

BEYOND THE CRISIS: ALTERNATIVE ECONOMIC PRACTICES IN CATALONIA.

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INTRODUCTION

For millions of people in Europe and North America the economic crisis that unfolded since 2008 has shaken the foundations of their lives. Suddenly, employment became uncertain, credit was restricted to a few, consumption reduced to the essentials, social services deeply cut, and a dark cloud engulfed the future of their children, reversing the pattern of higher expectations for the next generation. The crisis did not come as a surprise for those who did not expect much improvement in their lives from what they labelled capitalism, a short hand expression for the dominant social and economic organization. Not only they did not trust the façade of stability of a system submitted to recurrent crisis, but they rejected its basic principles. They objected to the destructive pace of life, to the nonsense of working relentlessly to have enough money to consume meaningless goods and services, eat chemical food, drug themselves, and compete with their human fellows in an increasingly aggressive world. They resented the destruction of the environment that in their view was advancing the expiration date for the human adventure in the blue planet.

Those who dared to live alternative ways of life, based on a different set of economic practices rooted in the quest for the use value of life and for meaningful personal relationships, built networks of solidarity, support and experimentation. They did not withdraw from society. Most of them had regular jobs and benefited from the safety net of the welfare state. Yet, while using

¹ In: Castells, M., Caraga, J., and Cardoso, G., eds. 2012. *Aftermath: Cultures of the Economic Crisis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Ch.9.

resources available to them, they engaged in various forms of production, consumption, exchange, education, health care, housing, urban living, communication, and cultural expressions, that provided meaning to their lives. So doing, they looked for improving their personal relationships, they learned how to work together and act together in a cooperative mode, and they gradually built their relative autonomy vis-à-vis the institutions of the capitalist market economy. And so, when the crisis hit they were prepared for it. Indeed, rather than being distressed, the dramatic events that followed confirmed, from their perspective, what they had been saying all along. They were strengthened in their convictions, as they suddenly seemed to be the wise lot rather than the marginal counter-cultural types.

For many others who had accepted an existence sustained by the dream of consumption and the fear of departing from normality, when the crisis disrupted their lives, a window of hope appeared through examples that offered glimpses of a different life. Not so much because of a sudden ideological conversion but as a result of the impossibility of living by the rules of the market. Being jobless or credit-less stalled the avenues of consumption. Not being able to count for sure on the safety net of the welfare state increased uncertainty for the future. The perceived incapacity of the political elites to solve their problems destroyed trust in the institutions in charge of managing the crisis. The only safe place was home, but with the possibility of mortgage foreclosure even home could vanish at any time. Thus, the notion of reconstructing everyday life around autonomous economic practices that do not rely on the banks or government became more realistic than the traditional pattern of economic behaviour.

This is not to say that the masses of the world joined in the practice of an alternative economic culture. But the possibility was opened of a convergence between cultural transformation and economic survival. How much this actually took place we do not know. It depends on specific conditions of countries, localities, economic environments, and social groups. And the record can only be set by rigorous investigation. This is the purpose of the research whose findings we present in this chapter. We know that there are a great deal of alternative economic practices in the world at large, some of them survivors of pre-capitalist cultures, others conscious projects of inventing another life, still others adapting to the uncertain contours of really existing capitalism. There is

also an increasingly abundant literature on these practices and their implications for social and economic change in a variety of contexts (Adaman and Madra, 2002; Gibson-Graham, 2006; Gibson-Graham, 2002; Leyshon et al, 2003; Miller, 2006; North, 2005).

In this chapter we focus on the observation of the rise of alternative economic practices in Catalonia. While this is a country that has always been characterized by a rebellious, innovative culture, and by social movements challenging imposed orders, we are not claiming any special distinction for our field of study. Indeed, we believe that any other country (say Germany or Britain, for instance) would yield a similar harvest of alternative practices. We are simply taking advantage of the privilege of having direct access to transformative processes in the Catalan society.

While embarking on our inquiry we kept in mind the distinction between those alternative economic practices that consciously aim at creating a new way of being, and non-capitalist practices that permeate people's everyday life out of necessity or of persistence of social forms that are not commodified. Therefore, our study has two different foci that we will try to integrate to the analysis.

On the one hand we have observed the networks, organizations, and individuals that, at least part time, consciously live apart from capitalist patterns of economic behaviour, and according to rules and values they find meaningful for themselves. On the other hand we have investigated to which extent these practices are integrated in the behaviour of the population at large during the time of crisis. Although our findings are preliminary, they suggest that there is more resonance than is usually acknowledged between a conscious alternative economic culture and the culture of a mainstream society shaken by the economic crisis.

This hypothesis explains our methodology that we will briefly describe here, referring to the methodological appendix of this chapter for technical details. First of all, we have studied the universe of conscious alternative economic practices in Catalonia by a sequence of three research operations:

- a) We identified networks and organizations involved in these practices and interviewed 70 individuals selected in terms of their strategic role and knowledge of the practices.
- b) On the basis of these interviews we made a documentary film (www.homenatgeacatalunyall.org) that communicated our findings to a broad audience, both nationally and internationally.
- c) We used the film to stimulate debate in eight focus groups that provided the opportunity to understand the formation of the consciousness of an alternative economic culture in the diversity of its expressions, and in contrast with individuals who do not share the culture.

Secondly, using the results from the qualitative research we elaborated a questionnaire, and we conducted a survey of a representative sample of the population of Barcelona (800 interviews). The survey tried to measure the extent of diffusion of each one of the identified alternative economic practices in society at large, and to determine the factors inducing or restraining the diffusion of these practices during the economic crisis. This chapter presents the results of these studies and tries to make sense of our observation.

I. THE CULTURE AND ORGANIZATION OF ALTERNATIVE ECONOMIC PRACTICES

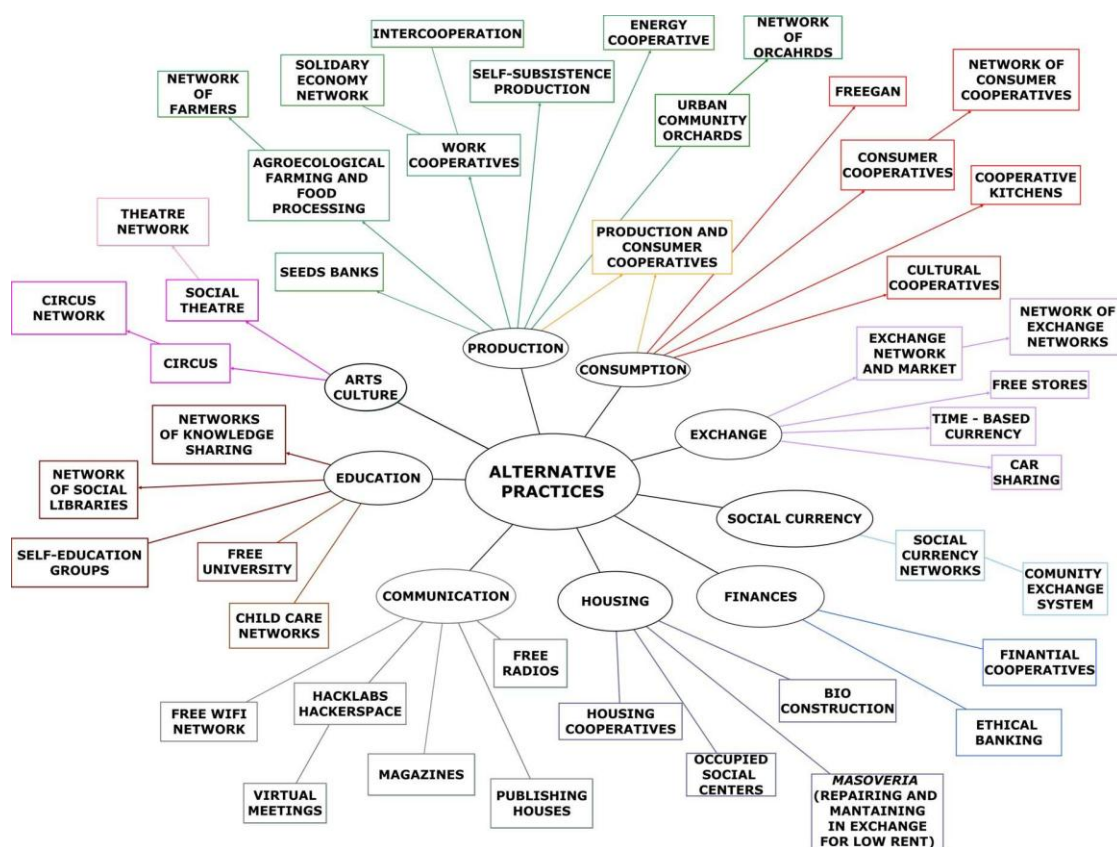
While economic practices that do not fit in the pattern structured by the rules of the capitalist market permeate throughout the entire society in people's everyday lives, in some cases there is a deliberate attempt to connect these practices to an alternative vision of the meaning of life. In this section we focus on the understanding of these conscious practices oriented toward a use value economy, and on the discourses that surrounds these practices. We will be referring to practices that are organized in various ways, be it in networks, associations, collectives or organizations such as cooperatives of diverse legal status.

We will start by identifying practices related to organizations that exist in Catalonia. While our observation focuses on the 2009-2011 period, the time of the economic crisis, many of these organizations, and related practices pre-date the crisis and seem to be related to the search for a more meaningful way of life

by thousands of people, most of them, but not all of them, young adults (approximate average age: 35), and usually college educated.

For the sake of clarity we have grouped the diverse universe of these organizations, and their membership, in a typology presented in Figure 1 and Table 1.

FIGURE 1



Note: This diagram illustrates the structure of the alternative economic practices that are most pervasive in Catalonia in 2010-2011. Source: our study.

Table 1: Typology of most active organizations involved in alternative economic practices in Catalonia. Estimation of organizations and participating persons.

	Number	Average number of persons	Total of persons involved
Agroecological Production Networks	12	22 Families	$264 \times 4 = 1056$
Agroecological Consumer Cooperatives	120	30 Families	$3600 \times 4 = 14.400$
Exchange Networks	45	120	5400
Social Currency Networks	15	50	750
Free Universities	3	200	600
Hacklabs	1	150	150
Shared Parenting Cooperatives	10	25	250
Seed Bank Networks	4	20	80
Community based Urban orchards	40	15	600
Total*	250		23, 286
+ Ethical Banks**	4	71138	284, 554
	254		307,840

* Some of the people involved in these practices may overlap. ** Numbers of persons in ethical banks indicate members and clients of the financial cooperatives.

We review these practices below:

Production

The most important form of alternative production is in the area of **agro-ecological farming and food processing**. This is not just organic production but, according to the producers' definition, "a production system that maintains the health of soils, eco-systems, and people" There are dozens of agro-ecological farms and hundreds of farmers distributed all around Catalonia.

Agro-ecological production also has a presence in cities, some of them supported by municipal governments. In Barcelona we counted 15 urban

community orchards cultivated and taken care of by neighbours, with the involvement of about 600 people. A significant agro-ecological activity is the organization and maintenance of seed banks, that preserve local varieties of fruits and vegetables to slow down the global trend of extinction of original seeds. These are also organized in networks of seed banks.

In related non farming activities, we see evidence of the growth of **self-subsistence production**, such as baking bread, raising poultry for eggs and meat, and cultivating vegetables in the terraces and gardens of private homes. There is also some artisanal production of domestic utensils. Many of these activities are integrated in networks of support, advice, and sharing.

Consumption

Agro-ecological consumer cooperatives have been growing fast in recent years. They usually organize consumers only but in some cases they integrate both producers and consumers. Although the producer-consumer networks are still a small phenomenon in Catalonia, they are connected to similar associations in Southern France, with a strong presence of the Association pour le Maintien de l'Agriculture Paysanne, and to Andalusia, with dynamic associations such as La Ortiga (Sevilla), La Brea (Málaga) and El Encinar (Granada). These associations are based on a stable commitment between producers and consumers bound by mutual solidarity. There are more than 100 consumer groups of agro-ecological products in Catalonia. There are complex internal debates to ensure that both consumers and producers find a fair balance between their interests. The expansion of these consumer groups, most of which were created in the 2000s, comes both from an alternative political culture, and from the growing concern about unhealthy food in a chemical production system. In 2008, a "meeting space" was organized to assemble around a debate among the people involved in the consumer cooperatives movement, over 10,000 persons at the time. The assembly, named La Repera, refused to organize a formal coordination, as they thought that the groups should be autonomous and able to engage in an open debate about the forms and aims of the movement around common goals of an

alternative form of food consumption. In the view of many participants, the instrumental dimension of the coops was only part of their collective project. The key was to build a network of conscious deliberation about how to live according to ecological and ethical values. As an extension of the consumer cooperatives there have been a number of experiments of autonomous school canteens organized by parents to ensure that their children are fed with agro-ecological products. There has been, as well, a growing trend towards the establishment of agro-ecological restaurants cooperatively managed.

Exchange

There are a considerable number of **exchange markets and exchange networks that engage in barter of goods and services**. Most of them are organized weekly in public squares and they serve primarily local residents. They do not use money, and they are based on voluntary valuation of the barter. Often they extend the barter process to email lists, sort of a Craigs list among local neighbours. One of the most active exchange networks, Xaingra, in the Gracia District of Barcelona, has over 1,000 members in its email list. Trust in a particular network is the prevailing characteristic of these exchange systems. Exchange of services is important, as people trade skills and time, as in the time banks systems that have proliferated around the world. We have identified 46 local exchange networks in Catalonia and 14 in Barcelona.

Social Currency and Ethical Banking

Social currency is a formal, printed note that indicates a value unit that is only accepted in a local network, or connected networks to the local network, to purchase goods and services. The goal is to remain linked to local production and distribution and to avoid accumulation, as the value depends on the participants in the network. In Catalonia the most developed social currency networks are the Ecoseny (from the Montseny area) and the Eco of Tarragona. In some cases, these currencies have been used in exchange networks in other areas, including Barcelona. Furthermore these currencies are integrated in a

world wide community exchange system that, as of 2010, included 254 social currency networks present in 31 countries and 300 localities (including 51 networks in the U.S.) The key issue is to coordinate the local exchange with the broader reach of the social currency, ultimately trying to develop an alternative currency system based on trust and equivalence, and excluding accumulation, inflation, and unfair exchange. Social currency proponents see its role in the broader context of the different levels of economic exchange. According to our interviewees: *"We could see different economic levels here, like circles that go from small to large, that have to be set in motion with rules that are different, but complementary. The first level is free, it's what you have with your family, and friends, it's your closest circle of trust. And without having to measure the value added by each person, just giving and receiving what you can is enough. The next level is direct exchange, also within a close-knit network but without the high level of trust found in a family unit. Then there's a circle which is further away, but is direct, that is, it allows for relationships which are direct and stable, which include, for example, something like a social currency. A social currency can help us substitute everything that currently functions with Euros, which is a way of valuing things that we can't control, and which is handled by banks. We can use rules that are created in committee, in a participatory way, and that we try to adjust to certain relationships... that we believe in, which are socially and ecologically fair. So everyone contributes and receives in a balanced way. Of course, ideally, the first level ends up consuming all the others. Of course if we do it backward, if the social currency ends up consuming all of the lower levels, bad news! The social currency has to consume the upper levels, the euro economy. If we don't have much trust we'll accept less credit, and we'll create less currency, and if we are more trusting we'll accept more credit and create more currency. More and more, you can take care of your needs through bartering and you don't have to use the euro. This means a huge shift in logic, in your time, in the day-to-day, in work, in how you define work, in working for a salary, so maybe your work is less tied to a salary, working more for others in a way that involves bartering and which is free. It's all a debate that doesn't make much sense on a theoretical level. What makes sense is to live it. And feel it within yourself"* (Text from 2 interviews on record)

Similar goals inspire the growing practice of **ethical banking and alternative financial cooperatives**, that include close to 300,000 clients and members in Catalonia. Thus, according to one of the founders of financial Coop 57, their business *“is quite simple: to collect money from its members in order to provide members with favorable conditions which are not provided by conventional banks”*. The director of a non profit financial entity, Fiare, describes its activity as *“a bank where social profitability is the most important thing, not economics but social values”* However, *“the project has to be profitable or it won’t grow, or even survive”*. By focusing on ethical goals and bypassing intermediaries they are both efficient and value oriented. The interesting matter is that in the midst of a global financial crisis, some of these entities, such as FIARE and Coop 57 appear to be impervious to the crisis. Indeed, they are growing, and are in good enough financial shape to provide loans for projects that correspond to their ethical views.

Housing

The lack of affordable housing, particularly for the younger population, is felt deeply by those that it affects. Alternative practices to deal with this crisis include housing cooperatives; agreements with landlords to repair and maintain vacant housing in exchange of low rents; agreements to cultivate the land in an abandoned farm to share the harvest and live in the premises; self-construction of various housing structures adjacent to existing buildings, without legal permits – a growing practice below the radar of the authorities.

In addition there is a particularly significant practice of squatting in vacant apartments and buildings. Here we must differentiate between illegal occupation of empty apartments by individuals and families in need, from conscious, equally illegal, occupations (the Okupas movement) that take over entire buildings as material support for an alternative way of life. The latter actions formed what is known as Occupied Social Centers, that organized cultural and social activities open to the neighbourhood at large. This includes services such as free repair of bicycles, legal and psychological support, exchange of services, free lessons of a whole range of skills, from music to programming. In 2010 there were 62 such Centers in Catalonia (52 in Barcelona and its

metropolitan area) whose aim is to materialize the vision of a different city and a different culture. They are often the target of police-backed evictions, sometimes leading to violent confrontations.

Education

A number of collectives attempt to create alternative educational institutions to provide a different education. The three main categories are: networks of knowledge sharing. Free Universities, and parental networks of alternative child care. Sharing knowledge networks are usually based on specific neighbourhoods and depend on agreements between persons to exchange lessons of their respective knowledge. Free Universities are usually housed in occupied buildings and offer a wide range of courses given by voluntary teachers, some of them university professors, others persons with knowledge and skills that want to help the education of the population at large. They offer formal courses, with a fixed time duration and explicit rules and program for each course. There is an implicit philosophy of denouncing the emptiness and uselessness of formal higher education, and showing in practice how students could be fully engaged when the content of the teaching and the participatory pedagogy are focused on their development rather than on what they consider the bureaucratic degree delivery logic of the universities. In 2011, in Barcelona, one of the free Universities, La Rimaia, was enjoying considerable success in terms of attracting students. In 2010 there was a network of five free universities in Catalonia that shared programs and resources.

Parents controlled child care networks originated from parents' critique of the care received by toddlers and young children in existing institutions. These networks are inspired by a free education philosophy with the goal of a full development of the child's personality. Parents are usually intensely involved in the process, with the help of professional educators. These are largely private, self-managed experiments that sometimes include home schooling.

COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

There are a number of free Wi-Fi networks, open and neutral, that have been organized on the basis of antennas installed by people themselves in their balconies around Catalonia. People are being advised and connected by a free virtual network, guifi.net that has over 9,000 nodes. It started as a response to the lack of Internet access in some rural areas, and it extended to cities as a free Catalan Wi-Fi. Thousands of prospective users are in the guifi.net waiting list.

Alternative communication networks, include free radio stations (about 30 of them in 2011), publishing houses, and dozens of magazines, and bulletins of all sorts. By free, as they label themselves, should be understood that in most occasions they do not fulfil the legal requirements for their activity. Radios often use non-attributed frequencies, thus being in direct violation of regulations. Contrabanda and RadioBronca are the most popular. Their programming breaks all habits of standard radio production. A popular program (Radio Nicosia) is entirely conducted by mentally ill persons. Around this nucleus of alternative communication there are book stores, publishing houses, and web sites that, while legally established, distribute the prints, images, and sounds of this alternative culture.

Free software and hacking of various kinds are also a key component of the alternative culture, often helping to set up wireless internet networks in sites of protest. There is a network of HackLabs that work as both training grounds for activists and centers of innovation for advanced free software programming. They also teach how to set up peer-to-peer networks for free downloading. These HackLabs are globally connected to the network of Hacktivists and other hacker networks, such as The Onion Router.

ALTERNATIVE CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Although strictly speaking theatre, film making, music performing and recording, plastic arts, and poetry are not considered economic practices, we want to include them in our observation because in current thinking of economic development, “cultural industries” have a prominent role. Thus, it is important to emphasize the extraordinary blossoming of all of these cultural creations within the alternative cultures of Catalonia. Indeed, art and social protest have always

been closely linked throughout history everywhere. Music plays a central role in the youth culture and life style. But perhaps theatre is the most openly critical performance in terms of its explicit message of resistance to the institutions of capitalism. There is a network of theatre groups that name themselves as “theatre of the oppressed”: Plataforma Autonoma de Teatro del Oprimido (PATO). They are based on voluntary work, self-managed production, direction, and acting. They perform in streets, public places, and Social Centers in order to reach an audience outside the sites of the high culture.

Altogether, these economic practices embody an alternative culture in its multidimensional manifestation. But what is the meaning of these practices for those who practice them?

II THE MEANING OF ALTERNATIVE PRACTICES: THE VIEW FROM THE ACTORS

To investigate the meaning of these alternative economic practices for the actors themselves we proceeded with an analysis of the internal debate within eight focus groups, designed according to our hypotheses, and studied following the procedures presented in the methodological appendix to this chapter. The overall purpose of the exercise was to contrast the discourse and self-representation of those persons consciously and actively engaged in these alternative practices, with people who were also sharing some of these practices but without assigning a deliberate meaning to their behaviour, and then with people whose economic practices were mainstream and hardly overlapped with the practices we intend to study. For the sake of clarity we will identify the first group as *culturally transformative*, the second as *alternative practitioners*, and the third one as *culturally adapted*. The rationale for this terminology will be clearer as we proceed with the analysis. It is important to emphasize that the three categories are found in all the groups in various proportions. However, our analysis will concentrate on the key themes emerging from the discussion in all the groups. We will identify the positions of the different actors for each one of these themes that characterize the rise of a

transformative economic culture in contrast with the other two categories in each one of the groups.

The Economic Crisis

It appears that alternative economic practices have been growing as the crisis of 2008 took full shape in the Spanish economy. Nevertheless, while everybody, regardless of his/her practice, is fully aware of the gravity of the economic crisis and feels the impact of its consequences, people differ widely in their perception and evaluation of the crisis. For the transformative persons the crisis is a consequence of the logic of capitalism and it should not come as a surprise. Indeed, it is the confirmation of their analysis of capitalism leading to their rejection to live according capitalist rules. Thus, most of them started to live differently before the crisis became visible in society, and feel to some extent vindicated by their preventive move of setting up an alternative way of life before being forced to do so by the crisis. They do not identify themselves with people who change their practices because of their inability to maintain their consumption pattern and level, to the point that they are sometimes reluctant to acknowledge the growth of new practices after the crisis. For them capitalism is in perma-crisis and it is a matter of being aware of it and escaping the trap to live to work to make money to consume instead of just living. They position themselves ideologically, and call for a political treatment of the crisis that deals with the roots of the crisis rather than adapting to its effects. For the alternative practitioners without a conscious ideological position, the crisis has shaken up their beliefs and understanding of their life. The crisis appears as a monster of uncertain profile that affects everything they used to do or think, so that adapting to the new environment is difficult and confusing. Thus, they change their practices: they consume less, they share, they are ready to try solidarity networks, and barter, and a number of other practices that are better suited to the economic unpredictability where they find themselves now, but without knowing why and how and towards which kind of future. While the transformatives anticipated the crisis, the practitioners are reacting, and learning by doing in the new world that they call, after the media, “the crisis”. In

contrast the adapted, unable to accept that this is a new condition, are in a waiting pattern, enduring the bad weather and hoping for the best. As the crisis deepens, the shift from being adapted to being practitioners of the culture of austerity may be one of the most decisive trends in ongoing social change.

The Culture of Work

The Culture of Work has been central in the industrial society, the society where the majority of the mature and aged sectors of the Catalan population grew up (25% of the residents of Barcelona are older than 64). In the focus groups we conducted, retired persons were adamant in their defense of the culture of work not only as a necessary economic practice but as a moral principle. Furthermore, the influence of the work ethic goes beyond the old age to influence the younger group engaged in conscious alternative economic practices. Their identifying characteristic is that they do not make a distinction between paid work and unpaid work. The key distinction for them is between rewarding work that has a creative or enjoyable component, and imposed, boring work that is done as a way to survive. Moreover, they value the kind of job that would fit into their own schedule and into their preferences. They see work as an expression of their choice and their autonomy, not meaningless work sometimes equated to slavery in the interviews. The majority of the transformatives seem to have the capacity to obtain skilled jobs or flexible working time. They are self-programmable workers. This self-programmable quality is actually the same set of capabilities required to operate self-managed networks on which alternative cultures are based. Many of these people are educated enough to have a well paid job. However, they have made a conscious choice not to take such a job because it would limit their autonomy and free time.

They feel secure enough about themselves to substitute quality of life, as they defined it, for money. They are conscious that not everybody has this kind of choice. People usually face constraints that make it difficult to reconcile work and personal life. They know that their cultural capital grants them the possibility of choice, and so they wish others would also increase their cultural capital. Yet, they do not necessarily equate this handicap to social inequality; they also

consider the difference in personal attitudes, the different priorities that people set for themselves. Some of them are aware that they could be blamed for elitism and they feel uncomfortable. On the other hand, some redeem themselves by referring to the risks they take to follow an autonomous path, and so they could deserve the freedom they obtain by sacrificing security.

For the transformatives, the key rationale is that one should start by defining the real economic needs, rather than going into an endless spiral of consumption where new needs always appear as a result of enticement in the market. Thus, they proceed to cut unnecessary spending, and as a result they do not need to earn so much and they can find flexible jobs that allow time to live. Their discourse is constructed on the relationship between the consciousness of their needs and the satisfaction of the needs that are worthy for them. Rather than starting from consumer preferences, as in the market logic, they start with life preferences and organize their needs accordingly. Needs determine how much money they need, and how much they value free time. The result of this calculation is the choice of a certain job or activity that optimizes the combination of this set of self-defined needs. In some persons there is an acute awareness of their internal contradiction: if they are able to live more fully with less money it is because of the subsidized services capitalism provides. It soon becomes obvious that the system is not external to their practice, and they live it as a contradiction. Moreover, they feel sometimes that they are members of an elite that has choices in a society in which the majority do not. They console themselves by saying they are just middle class with a college education.

Among the practitioners, the discourse on the centrality of work in their lives is full of ambiguity. They value their own time and the enjoyment of life over work. They would clearly prefer to work less for a lesser pay. For them happiness depends on the ability of each person to work according to her choice in terms of schedule and kind of activity. On the other hand, they are aware of the difficulty to find a job under such conditions in the current economic conditions. They feel trapped by mortgage payments, by their tight budgets, by their family responsibilities. Thus, they do engage in alternative economic practices as much as they can, and they would envisage a new way

of life in accordance to their quest for personal happiness. But such a project is perceived as an unattainable dream in contrast to the harsh reality of life.

As for the adapted, work is of paramount importance because it anchors their lives. Yet, interestingly enough, they would also prefer to work less and be paid less. But what dominates their discourse and their perception is the need to pay the bills for everything they do in life. They refer again and again that they have to pay the rent, the car, electricity, water, the whole range of family expenses, and to be able to do so they need a job as well paid as possible. So, life could be different and better, but it is as it is and there is no return to a situation freed of the constraints that derived from their constructed existence. They followed the socially established pattern in their life cycle, and any challenge to their routine would be disturbing and perceived as destructive.

The transition from a work culture to a personal fulfilment culture is better understood when we compare the discourse of the younger people (18-24) with that of the retired people in the focus groups. Most of the young persons identify with alternative economic practices as the desirable life style. But it is somewhat abstract for them because they often live with their parents and have not yet entered the professional world. Because most of them are studying, they try to make sense of their current effort by projecting themselves as working in the future, but working on what they would like to do, and in accordance with what they study. Thus, they do share the work culture, but in terms of chosen, meaningful work. On the other hand, facing the dire employment conditions during the crisis they do not think that they can achieve their projects. Thus, they display at the same time the hope for a meaningful working life and the frustration of perceiving the small chances of living it.

This is in sharp contrast with retired people. For them, work is the most important practice, what has given meaning to their lives. They cannot even think of people rejecting work, or being paid less in order to work less. There is an implicit disdain for the youth who resist working under any conditions. The cultural divide between the industrial society and the current society is fully manifested in the sharp contrast in the mental representations of those who already lived their lives and those who are now projecting their lives.

The Risk Society

To engage in alternative economic practices implies a certain risk in the current institutional environment. The risk increases with the depth and extent of each individual's involvement in these practices. Indeed, one striking finding in our analysis of focus groups is that the willingness to take risks appears to be the determining factor in jumping the fence and adopting a different way of life based on personal preferences rather than on the imperatives of the labor market. For instance, among the subdued or the practitioners, a recurrent fear of dropping the formal labor market is the loss of the rights to social security pensions when the time of retirement comes. However, in the discourse of the people who are most deeply committed to an alternative way of life, the fear of risk fades away under the effects of a powerful antidote: trust. They trust the persons around them, they trust their networks of support, and so, they do not feel the risk. Furthermore, they would not have it otherwise. This is the life they want. As for the concerns for the future, in terms of social security and other forms of public assistance, from the perspective of their relatively young age they feel optimistic about the chances of seeing the problems solved when they reach the point of needing assistance. When we asked how they could receive needed help, they project a horizon of social change, and believe that the exponential growth of networks of solidarity will be sufficient to care for each other when needs arise. Thus rather than counting on a traditional welfare state they hope for the self-management of networks of mutual support. This discourse in fact could be linked to the origins of the mutualist movement that preceded the modern welfare state.

Furthermore, when pressed on the question of the risks they face in their alternative life style, the transformatives refer to what in their perception is the real risk: living under capitalism, as the current economic crisis shows. In their views the risks are unemployment, low salaries, uncertainty of credit, cuts of basic social services, the insecurity of the whole institutional fabric on which the

lives of people depend. In contrast, autonomous economic practices, accepting a much lower level of consumption, and with the meaning of life placed beyond the consumption realm, do not depend on business cycles, on financial speculation or on failed public policies, processes that are all beyond people's control. In fact, some argue, to worry constantly about the future spoils the joy of the present. Since the future is out of control, it seems wiser to construct a different future out of the dynamic of a succession of meaningful presents.

In contrast with this vital attitude, other persons are mired on the risk that these practices entail. They usually find appealing the idea of having more free time or broadening the scope of their experience. But when considering the feasibility of these practices, social security and retirement weight decisively in their choice of caution and resignation. They find security and stability in earning more money, even if there is unanimity that money does not mean happiness. Happiness is somewhere else, in a universe that could be closer to the blueprint of life present in alternative practices. But this is seen as a forbidden Eden.

The perceived risk diminishes with the size of the networks of support that make alternative practices sustainable. The larger the network, and the more intense the expressions of solidarity that build trust, the greater the feeling of security. Large networks build trust. Small networks convey insecurity and, in addition, they induce fatigue of living in a small world in constant tension against the dominant logic of society. The feeling of risk related to alternative practices dwindles when the networks of support grow to the point to represent an alternative social organization. This effect of the size of the networks explains the exponential growth of some of these practices, particularly consumer cooperatives, exchange networks and ethical banking. We know the value of a network grows exponentially with the increase in the number of its nodes. Trust and security grow exponentially with the growth of the number of participants in a given network of practices, while the feeling of risk, and associated fears, decreases accordingly to the growth of trust and security. For a practice to become significant it has to reach a threshold of critical mass in terms of the numbers of people and organizations involved in the practice.

For the adapted, they do not feel the risk because they do not seriously consider engaging in alternative economic practices. They have a negative view

of those who do so. In the case of retired people they think this form of economic practice is simply wrong, contradicts what their own life is all about. Others, without being so critical, consider that the transformatives do not assume in fact any risk. Because of two opposite reasons that combined in the discourse: on the one hand, they are an elite that can afford to take risks because they are socially covered, and so there is no real risk; on the other hand, other people engaging in alternative practices do it because they have no real chances playing by the rules of the system, and so if they have nothing to lose because they have nothing, they are not taking any risk. However, for those refusing to engage in alternative economic practices, the fear of risk is very real, it is in fact so overwhelming that they do not even think about the possibility of taking it, and so they do not perceive any risk, and resent those who dare, dismissing them as elitists and free riders of the system they denounce.

The construction of alternative practices: Identity, Networks, and Circles

Those who are consciously engaged in alternative practices have a strong identity. They define themselves as people involved in a non capitalist way of life out of their conviction of seeking alternatives to a failed system. Their motivation is primarily ideological, and differentiates them from those who engaged in similar practices out of economic need. They often use the term “we” and oppose it to “the people”, it is “us” versus “them”, “me and the other”. In their view, being transformative, consciously engaged in alternative practices constructs a certain universe, a new society, in rupture with the mainstream, conventional world.

In the debates in the groups two poles appear clearly: those who assume their alternative culture and those who reject it. However, the separation is not total, because there is a group that says “I do not do it, but I know people who do it”, and the other, conscious group, who says “I do it but I know people who do not do it”. Thus, it would seem that there is a continuum of practices but a polarity in terms of consciousness and identity. The construction of this identity largely depends on the social environment. Alternative identity rises from being in touch with persons equally critical of the social organization and ready to live

differently assuming the necessary risk. For instance, in one focus group, one woman said she would like to practice an alternative economy but she had to yield to the pressures of her friends and family. Yet, another of the discussants said that when confronted with lack of understanding in his environment, he simply changed his network of friends to find a cultural home more akin to his views. Both cases illustrated the decisive influence of the social environment in shaping practices one way or another.

One interesting debate on identity refers to the use of the term “alternative” For some of those engaged in these kinds of practices; they want to use it to mark their distance vis-à-vis conventional society. But others, more sensitive to strategies to broaden what they see as a movement, they would rather not set up a terminological barrier to attract people who agree with the content of alternative practices but refuse labels that would put them in a special, segregated category. Here again, the willingness to affirm an identity instead of just engage in practices depends on the existence of a favorable environment that provides emotional support and social capital to openly break with the dominant norms of society. On the other hand, the practitioners usually agree with what they do in a small scale but would not see the whole society organized around alternative values. They refer to such an attempt as a utopia, something impossible, thus not worth pursuing. Yet, they see the possibility of living differently in their everyday life at a small scale, ready to change their lives, but not the world at large. They seek to set up a circle of practices, meaning a circle of directly known persons. There they see the possibility of social change. The reason, they argue, is that on this small scale personal trust can be established through direct knowledge and interaction, and so new social rules can grow organically. Going into a much larger group, trust becomes more difficult to establish, because these are unknown people, and it is difficult to trust people one does not know.

In sum, to dare to engage in alternative economic practices trust is basic, and trust is built by social support and personal contact with networks of people with whom practice can be shared and personal knowledge allows experimentation without fear: it is all right to make mistakes if they do it together. Yet, networks cannot extend beyond a size that makes difficult personalized contact. To know that someone who knows someone is aware of

similar alternative practices creates the connection that provides safety and learning experience. The intensity of the practice of sharing determines the likelihood of sharing practices.

Alternative Practices as a Process: Information Sharing, and the Dynamics of Time

The discussion in the focus groups emphasizes the fact that most people in society are unaware of the extent and intensity of alternative economic practices. There is consensus on the fact that the more people are aware of how many other people are engaged in this economic culture the more alternative practices diffuse. The question then is how to diffuse the information. Two perspectives are confronted in the discourse. On the one hand, the process of building an alternative culture is seen as suffering from insufficient inner communication, thus losing the opportunity for synergy and cooperation. On the other hand, some of the transformatives believe that there are organic processes through which people will find spontaneously what others do, linking up efforts without needing a directed organization external to the process. The advantage, in this view, comes from the notion that only what people find useful or desirable becomes incorporated to their experience. There is a debate on the dynamics of organization in emergent economic practices: a deliberate agenda to build up an organizing effort, or else, letting the networks grow and configure themselves in a much slower process that ultimately consolidates the connection between practices through the convergence of their values. The transformatives, particularly those who have been engaged consciously in alternative practices for some time, see these practices as a process. The development of these practices over time strengthens the social relations embedded in the practices. The process produces the practices. To live practicing an alternative culture generates new forms of culture embedded in new economic practices. It is an open ended process of experimentation in which the sharing of the learning process induces new forms of living that were not originally intended, but ultimately discovered. People do not move towards a programmed goal. They discover their goals, and themselves, in the process of learning by doing.

III. THE INVISIBLE ALTERNATIVE ECONOMY. SIGNS OF NON-CAPITALIST ECONOMIC PRACTICES AMONG THE POPULATION OF BARCELONA

The Diffusion of Non-Capitalist Economic Practices and their Connection to the Economic Crisis.

Perhaps the most important finding from our survey is that virtually everyone we surveyed —97% of respondents— has engaged in some kind of non-capitalist economic practices since 2008, the year the current economic crisis was initiated.² Although one of these practices, ethical banking, does involve paying money for goods or services and sometimes looking for profits, most practices considered here they are non-capitalist in the sense that their goal is not profit searching, but rather the pursuit of personal meaning. In fact, the vast majority of these practices do not involve financial payment or exchange at all. For this component of our research, we focus on the period 2008 to the present, in order to drill down on the practices and attitudes of people since the crisis hit.

Our survey shows that engagement in non capitalist economic practices is not a marginal movement in which only a small number of people participate. Table 2 illustrates the percentage of survey respondents who participate in each activity, and shows clearly that the percentage who participates is much higher than one might expect. Further, we see that there is a wide range of economic activities taking place—from urban gardening to cooperative childcare—that do not involve the exchange of money. We show evidence of a surprising extent of entrenchment of these practices, in terms of the breadth and depth of their use, and of the kind of people who engage in them.

² We will use the term “alternative” here as shorthand for non-capitalist economic practices.

Table 2: Data on the total population of Barcelona that performs or has performed the following practices (N=800)

	Percentage of the total population that has done the following practices in the period 2008-2011	Absolute Numbers
Self Sufficiency Practices		
Has painted or performed their own home repairs.	55.6%	445
Has repaired or made their own clothing.	39.0%	312
Has repaired their household appliances themselves.	34.6%	277
Has repaired their own car, motorcycle or bicycle.	21.5%	172
Has picked up food or useful objects found on streets or markets.	16.1%	129
Has planted tomatoes, vegetables, or other products for self consumption.	18.8%	150
Has raised chickens, rabbits or other animals for self consumption.	1.9%	15
Altruistic Practices		
Has lent or has borrowed books, movies, or music from people who are not family members.	64.5%	516
Has shared the use of video cameras, tools, home appliances and similar objects with people who are not family members.	34.0%	272
Has lent money with out charging interest rates to people who are not family members.	34.0%	272
Has repaired the house of others without the mediation of money.	21.3%	170
Has taken care of children, elderly people, or sick people without the mediation of money.	16.1%	129
Has repaired the car, motorcycle or bicycle of others without the mediation of money.	11.1%	89
Exchange and Cooperation Practices		
Has legally downloaded software from the Internet.	39.8%	318
Knows an agroecological farmer.	29.5%	236
Uses free software.	24.6%	197
Has engaged in teaching exchanges without the mediation of money.	23.8%	190
Has exchanged products, clothing, home appliances, and other goods without the mediation of money.	21.9%	175
Has shared the use of a car with people who are not family members.	17.6%	141
Has engaged in service exchanges without the mediation of money.	16.9%	135
Is or has been a member of a food cooperative.	9.0%	72
Has participated in a community garden.	6.9%	55
Lives with two or more adults who are not family members nor employees.	6.0%	48
Has taken care of other people's children in exchange for having others take care of their children.	5.3%	42
Has used social currency.	2.3%	18
Has participated in an ethical bank or credit cooperative.	2.0%	16
	Percentage of the total population that did this practice for the last time before the year 2008	Absolute Numbers
Self Sufficiency Practices		
Has painted or performed their own home repairs.	8.4%	67
Has planted tomatoes, vegetables, or other products for self consumption.	4.5%	36
Has raised chickens, rabbits or other animals for self consumption.	2.6%	21
Has picked up food or useful objects found on streets or markets.	2.4%	19
Has repaired their own car, motorcycle or bicycle.	2.3%	18
Has repaired or made their own clothing.	2.1%	17
Has repaired household appliances themselves.	0.5%	4
Altruistic Practices		
Has lent money with out charging interest rates to people who are not family members.	6.1%	49
Has repaired the house of others without the mediation of money.	3.0%	24
Has taken care of children, elderly people, or sick people without the mediation of money.	2.4%	19
Has lent or has borrowed books, movies, or music from people who are not family members.	1.5%	12
Has repaired the car, motorcycle or bicycle of others without the mediation of money.	0.6%	5
Has shared the use of video cameras, tools, home appliances and similar objects with people who are not family members.	0.3%	2
Exchange and Cooperation Practices		
Knows an agroecological farmer.	29.5%	236
Lives with two or more adults who are not family members nor employees.	6.0%	48
Is or has been a member of a food cooperative.	3.1%	25
Has engaged in teaching exchanges without the mediation of money.	2.1%	17
Has participated in a community garden.	1.9%	15
Has taken care of other people's children in exchange for having others take care of their children.	1.1%	9
Has shared the use of a car with people who are not family members.	1.1%	9
Has engaged in service exchanges without the mediation of money.	1.0%	8
Has legally downloaded software from the Internet.	0.5%	4
Has exchanged products, clothing, home appliances, and other goods without the mediation of money.	0.4%	3
Has used social currency.	0.4%	3
Uses free software.	0.1%	1
Has participated in an ethical bank or credit cooperative.	0.0%	0

Table 2 depicts the percentage of the total population that has done each of the practices at some point since 2008, the year in which the financial crisis began.³ We grouped the 26 practices into three categories—self-sufficiency, altruistic, and exchange and cooperation. Self-sufficiency practices involve work people do for themselves rather than going to the market to pay for goods and services. For example, nearly 20 % of respondents grow vegetables for their own consumption, a significant number for a dense urban area. More than half have performed their own home repairs, and more than a third have repaired their own household appliances; an equal number have made or repair their own clothes. Less numerous but still important are those who have repaired their own car, motorcycle or bicycle (21.5%) and those who have picked up useful objects or food on the street (16.1%). We know from the literature, and from our own qualitative observation that people may do these things in order to save money—perhaps because they do not have the money to pay for them—or because they enjoy the practices themselves.

A second category of activity is what we call altruistic practices, the performance of acts of service for others that are worth something in the market, without receiving financial compensation. 21% of survey respondents have repaired other peoples' homes without the mediation of money, and 11% have repaired the car, motorcycle or bicycle of others without the mediation of money. 16% have cared for children, the elderly, or sick people who are not family members, and **more than a third have lent money without interest to people who are not family members.**

Cooperation and exchange is the term we use to describe the third group of activities. These involve exchanging goods or services—bartering or the like—without using money as the medium of exchange. Nearly 65% of respondents have lent or borrowed books, movies, or music from people who are not family members. Nearly 22% of respondents have exchanged clothing, home appliances, and other goods without the mediation of money. 24% and 17% have engaged in teaching and service exchanges, respectively, without being paid monetarily. More than 17% have shared a car with someone who is

³ We specifically analyzed people who have engaged in non-capitalist economic practices since 2008, in order to focus on the period following the economic crisis. This group respects the representativeness of the survey, and constitutes 88% of the entire population surveyed.

not a family member, and 34% have shared the use of video cameras, tools or home appliances with people who are not family members.

A surprisingly high number of people—97% of respondents—have engaged in at least one activity. 83% have engaged in three or more. The average survey respondent has engaged in six practices, a high number that implies that non-capitalist activities are a regular part of life in Barcelona. The relatively recent appearance of technological tools to abet this kind of activity points to growing demand among younger people, the primary users of such tools.

Only 22 of the 800 people surveyed have not engaged in any of these practices since 2008. 77% of this small group is over the age of 64; many reported that age-related health issues have kept them from doing more.

In addition to asking about concrete practices, we also asked people whether and how they have been affected by the economic crisis. **The majority of survey respondents—62%--indicated that they have been negatively affected by the economic crisis.** More than half reported that the crisis has adversely affected their spending and their income, and has caused them to worry about their future and the future of their families. Nearly one third of respondents indicated that their employment has been negatively affected. The incidence of stress-related ailments from depression and anxiety to substance abuse, has increased since the crisis began, and many attribute these increases to the financial crisis. As early as October 2008, the World Health Organization warned that mental health problems and suicides would likely increase as people were forced to cope with poverty and unemployment.⁴ More than 29% of our survey respondents told us that their health has suffered as a result of the crisis.

We also gathered data on a range of attitudes towards capitalism and social change from survey respondents. The results of this component of our survey point to fairly broad disenchantment with the capitalist system. Over half of respondents answered “bad” or “very bad” to the question: “What do you think about capitalism?” Only 2.5% answered “very good.” Despite this negative attitude toward capitalism, the vast majority of respondents—77.4%--believe

⁴ “Financial crisis may increase mental health woes.” <http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/10/09/us-financial-health-mental-idUSTRE49839M20081009> (Date accessed: June 24, 2011)

that society can change for the better, and 67.8% believe that they can contribute personally to this change.

Nearly 60% of respondents reported that they would like to work less and make less money if such an option were possible. This finding, coupled with the deep engagement of a majority of people in non-capitalist practices, implies dissatisfaction with the capitalist system, and a desire for other ways to organize their work lives, and for greater control over their time. Those who told us they would like to work less indicated that they would spend more time with their friends and family, and pursue other activities they enjoy with their newly available time.

Who Does What? Social Categories and the Intensity of Non-Capitalist Practices.

When we look at particular socio-demographic groups, we see that there are several that engage in a relatively high or relatively small number of practices. Here, we dig more deeply into these groups in order to understand more specifically what they do and to consider why they might be more or less likely to engage in non-capitalist practices. Table 3 illustrates the average number of practices engaged in by each group that we analyzed, and the difference between each group and the mean for the total population, which is 6.29 practices. There is clearly some overlap between particular groups, such as young people and students at the high end of the spectrum, and between older people and the retired at the lower end.

Table 3: Comparison of practice intensity by socio demographic categories

	Number of practices performed (Mean)	Above or Below Mean
Total population	6.29	
Gender ***		
Male	7.08	0.79
Female	5.61	-0.68
Age ***		
+64 years	4.08	-2.21
50-64 years	5.52	-0.77
35-49 years	7.13	0.84
25-34 years	7.9	1.61
18-24 years	8.28	1.99
Educational Level ***		
Master's degree and above	7.29	1.00
College degree	6.77	0.48
Upper secondary education	6.37	0.08
Lower secondary education	5.55	-0.74
No education/primary studies not completed	4.35	-1.94
Occupation ***		
Liberal professional, Entrepreneur, Middle manager	7.69	1.40
Autonomous worker	7.24	0.95
Employed , Manual laborer	6.86	0.57
Housewife	4.39	-1.90
Retired	4.36	-1.93
Unemployed	7.57	1.28
Student	8.21	1.92
Marital Status ***		
Single	7.66	1.37
Married	5.47	-0.82
Unmarried living in couple	9.48	3.19
Divorced/Separated	7.31	1.02
Widow(er)	4.5	-1.79
Birthplace **		
City of Barcelona	6.53	0.24
Rest of Catalonia	6.05	-0.24
Spain	5.17	-1.12
Foreign-born	7.01	0.72
Time of Residence in Barcelona ***		
Has always lived (was born in Barcelona)	6.3	0.01
More than twenty years	5.33	-0.96
Between ten and twenty years	7.88	1.59
Between five and ten years	7.4	1.11
Less than five years	8.88	2.59
Income ***		
Above 5000 Euros	7.65	1.36
Between 4001 and 5000 Euros	7.11	0.82
Between 3001 and 4000 Euros	6.83	0.54
Between 2001 and 3000 Euros	6.99	0.70
Between 1001 and 2000 Euros	5.82	-0.47
Up to 1000 Euros	6.82	0.53
Does not know	6.1	-0.19
Does not answer	5.23	-1.06

*** Statistically significant at the 0.00 level, ** Statistically significant at the 0.01 level

Foreign-born people engage in a relatively high number of practices—seven on average. Significant portions of this group engage in nearly all of the self-sufficiency practices. 40.6% repair or make their own clothing and more than a quarter repairs their own car, motorcycle or bicycle, or pick up food or useful objects from the street. Substantial numbers also appear to be engaged in networks of exchange, as evidenced by the above average percentages of people who: 1) have cared for the sick, the elderly, or children who are not family members without receiving monetary pay (32% vs. 16%); 2) have lent money to people who are not family without charging interest (48% vs. 34%), and 3) have taken care of other people's children in exchange for others taking care of their children (6% vs. 5%). The focus on networks of exchange is not surprising given that foreign born people tend to live in close proximity and help each other. Interestingly, the foreign born who responded to our survey tend to be relatively well-established. More than half have lived in Barcelona for more than 10 years and another quarter have lived in Barcelona between 5 and 10 years.⁵ Fully 68% are between the ages of 25 and 49, and 37% describes themselves as employees. The foreign-born tend to be on the low- to middle part of the income spectrum, with 35% earning between 1,000 and 2,000 Euros per month, and another fifth earning between 2,000 and 3,000 Euros per month. Another fifth earn less than 1,000 per month, a figure that is commensurate with the 19% unemployment rate reported by this group of respondents, a figure that approaches the overall unemployment rate for Barcelona. If we relate this analysis of the practices of foreign born with the results of our immigrant focused group, we may conclude that immigrants tend to be more willing to engage in non capitalist practices than the native population at large. The paradox of course is that they emigrate from a more traditional culture to a more predominantly capitalist: this signals that non capitalist practices are not sufficient to make a comfortable living in a capitalist environment, however desirable they may be in terms of human relationships.

Students are also a highly active group in alternative economic practices. Like the foreign born, their activities tend to be concentrated in the self-sufficiency and exchange oriented categories. More than a third (34%

⁵ Note that we did not ask them when they immigrated to Spain, so it is possible they have lived in this country for a longer time.

compared to the average in our sample, 16%) have picked up food or useful objects found on the streets, and 31% have repaired their own car, motorcycle or bicycle. This group tends not to engage in more home-based self-sufficiency practices such as growing vegetables and repairing their homes because they are the most footloose of all of the age groups we studied. With respect to exchange-oriented activities, nearly 90% (vs. 65% on average) have lent or borrowed books, movies or music from people who are not family members, and 58% (vs. 34% on average) have shared the use of video cameras, tools and home appliances with people who are not family members. Students, by virtue of being students, have an easily accessible network of other students, along with ready systems with which to communicate with their peers, which helps to explain their heavy involvement in exchange oriented activities.

With respect to employment status, those who are in middle management are quite active. The majority of people who constitute this group (64%) are men, and most (43%) are between the ages of 35 and 49. Forty-six percent are single, and an equal number are married. Most—71.4%—are highly educated, having obtained a college degree. Eighty six percent have painted or repaired their own homes, 100% (vs. 65%) have lent or borrowed books, music, and movies with non-family members, 64% (vs. 34%) have lent money without interest to non-family members, and 64% (vs. 40%) have legally downloaded software from the internet. 43% (vs. 16% of the total population) have taken care of children, the sick or the elderly without receiving money for their services.

Men tend to engage in more practices than do women—7.1 vs. 5.6, although this is probable due to the high feminization rate among the oldest group of the population, those less prone to engage in alternative practices. Perhaps not surprisingly, we see rather stark gender differences in terms of the kinds of activities that women and men engage in, indicating that the gender division of labor continues to exist both in the home and in the engagement of other activities. For example, 55% of women have repaired or made their own clothing, as opposed to 20% of men. Nearly half of male survey respondents have repaired their household appliances themselves, whereas only 22% of women have done so. Men are more likely to engage in activities related to

technology—54% (vs. 27%) have downloaded software from the internet, and 34% (vs. 16.5%) have used free software.

Unmarried people living in couples are particularly active in alternative practices, probably a function of their cultural independence usually associated with this kind of households. Also especially active are the most recent residents of Barcelona (fewer than five years). This fits into the well know pattern of entrepreneurialism and autonomy among those who come to live in a different environment.

Those who are unemployed tend to engage in a higher than average number of practices—7.6. Perhaps not surprisingly, their activity tends to be concentrated in the “self-sufficiency” category of practices. Thirty percent (vs. 19% of the total sample) plant vegetables for their own consumption. Nearly half (vs. 35%) repair their own household appliances, and nearly 70% (vs. 56%) have done their own home repairs. These findings make sense, given that this group has more time and less money than they did before their unemployment.

The Relationship Between the Economic Crisis, Attitudes Towards Capitalism and Alternative Practices

Our analysis of the survey shows that people who have been negatively affected by the economic crisis are more likely to engage in a higher number of non-capitalist practices than those who say they have not been negatively affected (6.52 practices vs. 6.29).⁶ Of the group that has been negatively affected, the subgroup whose employment has suffered engage in the greatest number of practices—7.4, on average. *This provides some evidence in support of our hypothesis on the intensification and diffusion of alternative economic practices in the wake of the economic crisis.*

There also appears to be an interesting relationship between attitudes towards capitalism and intensity of engagement in non-capitalist practices. On the whole, those who are disenchanted with capitalism and would like to see change happen, also tend to engage in a higher number of alternative practices. People who think capitalism is “very bad” engage in 7.6 practices, on average. Those who believe that capitalism is very bad for their personal lives engage in

⁶ We counted how many practices each respondent has participated in. We use this number, but very cautiously, as a kind of proxy for the extent of their engagement in non-capitalist practices. We did not ask respondents how much time they spend per day or per week actually doing these practices.

8.9 practices, on average, and respondents who are interested in working less and receiving less pay engage in nearly 7 practices, on average. We also see that those who believe they can contribute to positive social change tend to engage in a greater number of practices, 7.1.

Table 4: People who are disenchanted with capitalism engage in more non-capitalist practices

Attitude	Average number of practices
Capitalism is very bad	7.6
Capitalism is very bad for my personal life	8.9
I would like to work less and earn less	7.0
I believe I can contribute to positive social change	7.1

Interestingly, those who expressed an interest in working less for less money tend to be on the low- mid- part of the socioeconomic spectrum; more than one third earn less than 2,000 Euros per month. More women (56.3%) than men (46.4%) would prefer to work less and earn less, which makes sense given the household and care giving activities that typically fall to women. The group who has this attitude is distributed relatively evenly across the age spectrum; the largest subgroup—at 27 percent—is 35 – 49 year olds, who are most likely to be reaching a plateau in terms of their income, and being responsible for small children and older parents. Half of this group is married, implying that it might be easier for them to earn less if they have a spouse who also contributes to the household income; however, nearly a third are single and not living with a partner.

We did not find that the youngest group we surveyed—18 – 24 year-olds, felt very negatively about capitalism, or thought they could contribute personally to making the world a better place. Those who felt they could positively impact the world tended to be between 25 and 49 years of age, relatively well-educated. Our guess is that since most 18-24 years old are still living with their parents, they do not feel the world as such a harsh place.

We wanted to understand the profiles of respondents who had positive and negative attitudes toward capitalism. For this part of the analysis, we collapsed the responses of “good” and “very good” and “bad” and “very bad” to the question, “What do you think of capitalism?”. We do not see much difference between those with positive and negative perceptions when we look at gender, education and age, but we do when we consider income levels. Not surprisingly, 45% of respondents with a negative perception of capitalism earn less than 2,000 per month. Most are older—26% are over the age of 64.

An analysis of our survey surfaces two critical findings. The first is the existence of a broad set of non-capitalist practices that people engage in to lower their cost of living, to connect to local and far-flung communities, to help others, and simply to fulfil themselves. The second is major dissatisfaction with capitalism and its trappings. Further, the correlation between disenchantment with capitalism and engagement in a greater than average number of practices implies that those who are not happy with the dominant economic arrangement are opting out, albeit quietly, by seeking out alternative ways to manage their lives and take control of their time. Despite their dissatisfaction, they are an optimistic bunch, believing that the world can change for the better, and that they can be a part of that change.

CONCLUSION: FROM ECONOMIC CULTURE TO POLITICAL MOVEMENT

On May 15th 2011, street demonstration were called over the Internet In Madrid, Barcelona and other Spanish cities, to claim “real democracy now” a few days before municipal elections would be held. This was an initiative of a group of activists who wanted to protest against the incapacity and dishonesty of the political class in its mishandling of the economic crisis. Without any kind of organization or leadership, tens of thousands of people responded to the call. At the end of the demonstration in Madrid about two dozen demonstrators decided to camp for the night in Plaza del Sol, the main square of the town, to discuss among themselves how to reverse the destructiveness of a crisis out of a control as a result of the irresponsibility of politicians. The next night a group of people decided to do the same in Barcelona, at Plaça Catalunya, the main square of the town. They tweeted their friends to come and join them. Hundreds

came, who tweeted their friends as well, so that after 3 days, there were thousands camping in the square, and additional thousands in Madrid and other cities and towns of Spain and Catalonia. They called themselves “the indignants”, as their protest was born from the indignation they felt about mass unemployment, housing evictions, mediocre education, cuts in public services, and widespread injustice in the entire realm of their experience. They focused their indignation on bankers, politicians of all sorts, political institutions, and governments. In their view the crisis was not really a crisis but the consequence of the failure of capitalism to provide a decent living and of the inability of pseudo-democratic institutions to represent the interest of the people. They camped for weeks and debated in assemblies and multiple commissions what should be done and how to achieve it. They were adamant to reject any formal leadership, ideology, or permanent organization. Only the assemblies could make decisions after hours of respectful debate and open voting. After almost one month the assemblies in each locality decided to leave the camps but called for organization of assemblies in neighbourhoods and towns around the country, for demonstrations and protests focused on political institutions, for mobilizations against the austerity measures imposed by the European Union and the International Monetary Fund to avoid the bankruptcy of entire countries, and the fall of the euro. The majority of Spaniards were sympathetic to the “indignants”, as many as 84% according to a survey commissioned by the prestigious daily “El País”. The gap between politicians and citizens became wider than ever, and the Spanish Parliament started to debate some of the proposals from the movement in terms of political reform, in spite of the skepticism of the “indignants” about the sincerity of any political opening.

What is significant from our analytical perspective is that many of those who are the object of our analysis in this chapter as participants in alternative economic practices were present in the “indignants” movement. For them there was a logical continuity between their distance from the norms and institutions of capitalism and the protest against the indignity of the political leaders that, in their view, led most people in Catalonia, Spain, and Europe to the dead end of the crisis in the labor market and in social services, while banks recorded unprecedented high levels of profits. Moreover, the resonance we found between the alternative economic practices of a conscious minority and the

wide diffusion on non capitalist economic practices in a sizable segment of the population of Barcelona is mirrored in the support of the majority of public opinion (exemplified in the attendance of hundreds of thousands to protest demonstrations on June 19th 2011) to the projects of alternative democracy put forward by those camping in the public squares. Furthermore, these protests were spontaneous, without formal leadership, and without any participation of the trade unions and political parties. While at the origin of the protest there was the reaction against the economic crisis and its social costs, the demands of the protesters were not limited to the usual catalogue of economic demands, but configured a project of a new economy based on many of the alternative practices that we have observed in this study. Yet, for this project to prosper, in the views of the movement, a new politics must arise, as the necessary lever to move from the margins of society to a new social organization of life. Thus, the alternative economic culture that preceded the economic crisis by virtue of its prescient critique of capitalism rose to the forefront of the public debate when it became clear for many that the return to the happy days of debt driven capitalism was questionable. The stage was then set for the confrontation between a disciplinary model of hardened, shrunk, financial capitalism, and the deepening and diffusion of an alternative economy that a conscious minority had dared to start living in. This is a direct political conflict whose outcome will determine the world we will live in the aftermath of the crisis.

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METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

Our research designed comprised four different operations:

- 1) Identification and analysis of alternative economic practices by participation observation and interview of some of the key actors involved in the practices
- 2) Production of a documentary film on alternative economic practices based on the interviews of our study

- 3) Organization of eight focused groups to discuss the values and issues involved in alternative economic practices. The film was used as a stimulus to trigger the debate.
- 4) Survey of a representative sample of the population of Barcelona (800 interviews) with questionnaire elaborated on the basis of the findings of our qualitative studies.

We summarize here the features of each one of these research operations:

SELECTION OF ORGANIZATIONS AND NETWORKS OF ALTERNATIVE PRACTICES AND INTERVIEWS OF THE PARTICIPANTS IN THESE PRACTICES

Between October 2009 and May 2010 we interviewed **seventy persons** engaged in alternative economic practices. The interviews were video-taped and transcribed. To select the interviewees, we first conducted in 2009 participant observation in a number of organizations and networks of alternative economic practices. We constructed a typology of practices in the following categories: production, consumption, exchange, social currency, ethical banking, housing, education, communication, information technology, arts. For each category we selected specific networks and organizations and we interviewed individuals engaged in each one of these practices. We relied on the advice of the actors themselves to identify the most significant practices and the most significant interviewees. For the most extended practices (consumer cooperatives, exchange networks, urban orchards, and agro-ecological producers) we selected the cases to be analyzed using three criteria: practices that were older than three years in contrast to practices with less than three years; size of the network engaged in the practice; urban versus rural. Following these criteria we selected the following collectives:

Cooperativa de Trabajo (Services of Coaching of Group Interaction); Colectivo de Teatro Social; Proyecto de Vivienda de Masoveria Rural; 4 Cooperatives of Consumo Agroecológico; 2 Cooperatives of Shared Child Care: Proyecto de Rehabilitación de Vivienda y de Convivencia; 3 Exchange Networks and

Exchange Markets; Proyecto Integral de Vivienda Rural y Producción y Autoempleo; 4 Urban Orchards; Cooperativa Cultural, Facilitadora de Grupos, Asociación de Promoción de Cooperativas de Vivienda; Distribuidor-Transportista de Productos Agroecológicos; Comedor Cooperativo; 2 Projects of Occupied Buildings; Proyecto Integral de Prácticas No capitalistas; Universidad Libre; Red de Educación Libre; 2 Banca Ética projects; Programador de Programario Libre al servicio de Redes de Intercambio; Hacklab, laboratorio Hacker; Banco de Semillas; 2 Agro-ecological producers; Productor Agroecológico; Red de Intercambio con Moneda Social; Puppeteer; person engaged in the diffusion of non capitalist practices; person engaged in consumer cooperatives; person engaged in coordination of consumer cooperatives and collectives to promote agro-ecological production.

In most cases, the collective itself decided who should be interviewed, using two criteria: it should always be one man and one woman together; it should be someone with more than three years of experience and with less than three years of experience in the collective.

All the interviews were conducted in the place where the practices take place. While interviewing we observed and filmed the meeting place and, when possible, the practices themselves. The duration of interviews varied between 40 minutes and 2 hours. 57% of the interviews took place in Barcelona and 97% in the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona (including the city), of which 3% were in a rural environment. 3% of interviews were in the rural areas of Tarragona. 55% of the interviewees are men, 45% women.

The age distribution is as follows:

9%	18-24 years old
48%	25-34
37%	35-49
2%	50-64
4%	+ 64

FOCUS GROUPS

We designed eight focus groups. The procedure was the same for each group. Prior to the meeting they watched the documentary film “Homage to Catalonia II” (one hour). In the meeting they engaged in a debate directed and moderated by the research team following a thematic guideline prepared in advance. The debates were recorded and transcribed. The design of the focus groups was based on criteria of the different intensity of engagement in alternative economic practices, as well as the socio-demographic composition of the group when we intended to understand the cultural attitudes of specific groups, such as youth, retired workers, women with family responsibilities, and immigrants. These are the groups that we studied:

1. Group of persons with a high level of participation in alternative economic practices.
2. Group of persons with low levels of participation in alternative economic practices.
3. Mixed group of persons with high levels of participation and low levels of participation in alternative economic practices.
4. Group of mothers with high level of participation in alternative economic practices.
5. Unemployed persons
6. Group of youth 18-24 years old
7. Group of retired person of a working class background
8. Group of immigrants.

Within each group (with the exception of specific age or gender groups) we included persons of different ages, gender, and educational level.

The immigrant group included persons from Morocco, Romania, Uruguay, Cuba, and El Salvador.

The number of participants in each group oscillated between 7 and 12, with the exception of persons with low level of alternative practices that was formed by 5 persons.

The focus groups met between November 2010 and May 2011, usually in a room at the University, except for the group of unemployed persons, retired workers and for the immigrant group that met in the premises of their associations.

THE SURVEY OF ALTERNATIVE ECONOMIC PRACTICES IN THE POPULATION OF BARCELONA AT LARGE

We administered a questionnaire of 43 questions to a statistically representative sample of the population of Barcelona. 800 telephone interviews were conducted between February 9th and February 10th, 2011. The questions focused on a list of 26 alternative economic practices, on attitudes towards capitalism and social change, and on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. The questionnaire was elaborated by our research team. The design of the sample, the pre-test of the interviews, and the interviews were realized by the technical team of Instituto Opina, one of the leading private survey research organizations in Spain. (www.opina.es). Technical details of the sampling and interviews as well as the questionnaire are available upon request (accardenas@uoc.edu)