

FOCUS SUBJECTS

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to look at alternative economic practices, which we define as practices of production, consumption and distribution where the satisfaction of needs and desires takes priority over the maximization of personal gain and benefit, an economy where the aim is life. We argue that these practices are sustainable, solidarity and decentralized because they are woven into dynamic networks capable of overcoming individualization and hierarchical division of labor. We propose the study of this universe as an economic culture, because without an understanding the underlying values that support it, this type of economy cannot be understood. To carry out this task we identified networks and organizations involved in these types of practices and interviewed 70 individuals who were selected based on their strategic role and knowledge of these activities. On the basis of the interviews we created a documentary film (www.homenatgeacatalunya.org) to communicate the findings of the interviews to a larger audience. We then used the documentary to stimulate debate in 8 focus groups that provided the opportunity to understand the formation and consciousness of an alternative culture, and finally we elaborated a questionnaire and conducted a survey on a representative sample of the population of Barcelona in order to measure the extent of diffusion of non-capitalist economic practices. We offer a review of the following key cultural values that give meaning to this economic culture: the value of work, the perception and limits of risk, the construction of alternative identities, the value of things, cooperation as a strategy to obtain “prosumption” at a local level compared to global consumption, the importance of creativity, the attitude of being natural, the challenge of integrating differences and learning to conflict with others to address this challenge, and finally the breakup of patriarchy which allows us to link the proposed culture with feminist economics. We provide results from the survey conducted which indicate engagement in non capitalist economic practices is not a marginal movement in which only a small number of people participate. We also provide some broad patterns and potential associations between engagement with certain practices and characteristics: socio-demographic, degree of impact by the crisis, attitudes and motivations.

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