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Economic moralities in self-organised alternative economies: the Finnish cases of ridesharing and timebanking

Abstract

Purpose

This paper examines economic moralities in self-organised alternative economies and argues that the *diverse economies* approach is particularly useful in elaborating the self-understandings of such economic communities. The analysis focuses on two types of alternative economies in Finland: ridesharing and timebanking.

Design/methodology/approach

Through qualitative data, the paper looks into moments of negotiation where economic moralities of self-organised alternative economies are explicitly debated. The main research data consists of social media conversations, supplemented by a member survey for the participants of the studied timebank. The data is analysed through theory-guided qualitative content analysis.

Findings

The analysis shows that the moments of negotiation within alternative economies should not be understood as simple collisions of mutually exclusive ideas, but rather as complex processes of balancing between overlapping and partly incommensurable economic moralities. While self-organised alternative economies might appear as functionally uniform at the level of their everyday operations, they still provide considerable leeway for different conceptions of the underlying normative commitments.

Originality/value

To date, there is little qualitative research on how the participants of self-organised alternative economies reflect the purpose and ethics of these

practices. This study contributes to the body of diverse economies research by analysing novel case studies in the Finnish context. Through empirical analysis, this paper also provides a theoretical framework of how the different economic moralities in self-organised alternative economies can be mapped.

Keywords

diverse economies, alternative economies, economic moralities, ridesharing, timebanks, Finland

Introduction

”The economy” is a significantly broader and blurrier field than the usage of the word in economics, policy discourse or popular media might suggest. As noted in critical debates within economic sociology and economic anthropology, economic practices are deeply embedded in social and cultural trajectories (e.g., Sahlins, 1976; Granovetter, 1985). No economic system is, nor cannot be, as self-contained as the image of the capitalist market suggests. According to the *diverse economies* approach (e.g. Gibson-Graham 2010; Roelvink *et al.*, 2015), what is thought of as the ”real economy” is only the tip of the iceberg that conceals myriads of ways of organising the governance and use of resources.

The notion of diversity has often been used to inform critical social analyses of the capitalist economy (e.g. Gibson-Graham and Dombroski, 2020). This approach allows seeing the economic system broadly as a social and cultural organisation, whereas “economics” treats the economy as detached from its social surroundings and economic activity as having value only through exchange in capitalist markets. Using “the economy” as a synonym for capitalism makes all other ways of organising, exchanging and distributing invisible, and thereby undervalued. As this is largely a norm in policy and popular discourse, highlighting alternatives is a form of performative politics.

Yet the multiplicity of economic logics can be illuminated even further by focusing on intentionally constructed ”alternative” economies (Healy, 2009). Within these intentional constructions, ideas about the variegated logics of valuation can be more explicitly pronounced than within the more conventional

and institutionalised economic forms. For an increasing number of people, engaging in the construction of these alternatives is a concrete way of seeking to reclaim control over economic processes broadly understood and to explore alternatives to the existing economic organisation. It is highly important that we understand how these alternatives attempt to redefine value, in addition to how they seek to remodel economic organisation.

In this article, the diversity of everyday economic thought and practice is examined through two types of self-organised alternative economies: ridesharing and timebanking. Ridesharing is a form of shared mobility that ultimately is ”older than horse-and-buggy travel” (Shaheen, 2018) but has only recently experienced a novel and peculiar iteration enabled by the surge of digital communication platforms and the ubiquity of Internet access (Guyader, 2018; Chimenti, 2020). Timebanking, for its part, has already for some time been seen as a flagship model of community economies that binds together the local community and an alternative form of exchange and value-creation (e.g. Cahn, 2000). Both practices have received public attention as thriving examples of alternative exchange, peer production and the sharing economy. They rely on voluntary organisers’ inputs and online digital platforms and engage people with various backgrounds and motivations.

The purpose of the study is to examine the *economic moralities* in these two self-organised alternative economies. Chelsie Yount-André (2017) describes economic moralities as ”normative expectations of material obligation and entitlement”, locating the concept in the intersection of Maussian economic anthropology and linguistic anthropologists’ discussion of ”ordinary ethics” (ibid., p. 14). Here, we follow a similar path and utilise the concept in examining how the participants of self-organised alternative economies interpret the underlying normative commitments of their activities. (See also Maurer 2019.)

Social and cultural underpinnings of economic practices

Economic sociology often takes as a starting point that everything “economic” is embedded in social practices (e.g., Polanyi, 1944; Granovetter, 1985;

Hollingsworth and Boyer, 1997). While at the surface level, the economy might appear as a distinct and self-contained sphere, it is fundamentally grounded on institutions, norms and practices (e.g. Mingione and Ghezzi, 2017). Ultimately, it is "virtually impossible to separate market and culture" (DiMaggio, 1994, p. 41), as markets are as much about ritualised symbolic exchange as they are displays of calculative rationality. The formal economy and its "spirit of calculation" (Bourdieu, 2000) should, thus, be seen only as a thinned and abstract expression of the price mechanism (Swedberg, 1994; Velthuis, 2005).

The social embeddedness of economic practices highlights the importance of social norms in understanding how resources are organised. As anthropologist Arjun Appadurai writes, behind the "ordinary dealings" of the day-to-day economic life, there is a "broad set of agreements concerning what is desirable, what a reasonable 'exchange of sacrifices' comprises, and who is permitted to exercise what kind of effective demand in what circumstances" (Appadurai, 1988, p. 57). These agreements are manifest in locally specified, often inconsistent domains of value (Gudeman, 2001, p. 6).

The economy only appears as a self-contained and functionally detached sphere due to a perpetual process of "economisation" (Çaliskan and Callon, 2009). The same applies to concepts such as "the market", as well as to economic rationalities expected in the behaviour of "the economic man" who "does not describe the hidden nature of the human being" (Callon, 1998, p. 23): these abstractions retain their plausibility through specific discursive practices. This discursive nature of the economic order implies that economies are always contingent and contestable. As geographer Bent Flyvbjerg (2001, p. 44) notes, "economic theories exist by virtue of the practices by which people define the concepts of money, property, economic behaviour, etc." and these can change at any time". Indeed, economic ideas that are commonly taken for granted are embodied beliefs and dispositions that influence how people understand goods to be goods and what people do with their money and their assets (Wherry, 2012). This porosity of concepts opens an intriguing challenge for social sciences to investigate how people understand them, embody them and relate to them in different contexts.

Besides being socially constructed, economic concepts can be seen as *performative* (Callon, 1998; Gross, 2014): they do not merely describe the world from an outsider's perspective, but rather actively participate in the construction of economic realities. Quoting sociologist Donald MacKenzie's catchphrase originally used to describe finance, economics should be seen as "an engine, not a camera" (MacKenzie, 2008). Because of this performative nature, the choice of economic concepts bears epistemological and political consequences. Describing and doing the economy are not separate realms, but rather, the ethical, ontological and epistemological aspects are fundamentally enmeshed (cf. Barad, 2007).

Economic diversity and the self-organised alternative economies

The *diverse economies* approach has recently gained prominence in the studies of economic plurality (e.g. Watson, 2016; Houtbeckers and Taipale, 2017; Zademach and Musch, 2018; Krueger *et al*., 2018; Rose, 2019; Fletcher, 2019; Soaita, 2019). This approach frames the economy as being constituted of various organisational forms and logics of valuation. A major aspiration in this line of research has been to re-examine the social practices of the capitalist economy in order to unveil its already existing plurality and thereby to diminish its ontological hegemony (Gibson-Graham *et al.*, 2013).

Through highlighting the heterogeneous practices behind the monolithic façade of capitalism – and even beyond the dichotomy of capitalism and "other-than-capitalism" –, Gibson–Graham depict an economic mosaic that serves to challenge the assumed hierarchies of visibility and power. While even many critical accounts tend to posit alternative economies as inherently dependent of and subordinate to capitalism (Gritzas and Kavoulakos, 2016), the research on diverse economies, on the contrary, often operates in a "post/critical" setting (Alhojärvi, forthcoming) which assumes that the problems of capitalism-centred ontologies and critiques could be overcome by a mere performative shift from criticizing capitalism to affirming its alternatives. As Ethan Miller (2015, p. 366) points out, it is too easy to get caught between the dichotomic choice between a "politics of denunciation" and a "politics of possibility".

To be sure, the capitalist economy is not a uniform or self-contained totality but a heterogeneous collection of economic practices. In this sense, it is somewhat problematic even to talk about ”alternative” economic forms and thereby to risk ”othering” them further (Gibson-Graham *et al.*, 2013; White and Williams, 2016). Instead of being supplementary to the “mainstream” economy, the economic practices labelled as alternative can be understood as constituting the very core of economic organisation (Stephens *et al.*, 2008; Cahn, 2009; Coote, 2012; Graeber, 2014; White and Williams, 2014; Goodwin, 2018). On the other hand, framing alternative economies as alternatives *to capitalism* is debatable since not all of the actors contributing to these informal economic practices conceive their intentions in such strategic nor oppositional manner. In the context of this study, we argue that the practice of establishing informal economic communities and the sufficiently articulated wish to ”do things differently” suffice to justify analysing them under the rubric of alternative economies. The emergence of such communities of peer production and informal exchange already implies that the options provided by markets have not been considered sufficient.

Gibson-Graham (2006) illustrate economic diversity by the *iceberg metaphor*, which demonstrates that many of taken-for-granted economic notions (such as wage labour and market) actually comprise a small portion – the tip of the iceberg – of how value is produced, exchanged and distributed. The submerged part of the iceberg, then, expresses the multiplicity of the already existing ways of living the economy otherwise. To elaborate Gibson-Graham’s framework for researching alternative economies, a distinction should be made between attempting to diversify the depiction of the “mainstream economy” and of analysing alternatives that *intentionally* depart from the established market practices.

Intentionally constructed self-organised alternative economies can be analytically revealing on the diversity of social practices, as their participants at least to a certain degree share an understanding of the other-than-market practices and codes of conduct (on the politics of alternative economies, see Miller, 2013; North, 2007). Examples of such alternative economies include timebanks, *LETS* (local exchange trading) schemes, local currencies, co-operatives and exchange platforms (North 2007; Utting, 2015; Seyfang and

Longhurst, 2013), but also more specific practices of peer production and peer sharing such as communal urban gardens (Veen and Dagevos, 2019; Pikner *et al.*, 2020) or non-profit ridesharing (Chimenti, 2020). These represent a turn to a *do-it-yourself* ethos and an attempt to reassert control over economic practices (cf. Gibson-Graham *et al*, 2010) along with a push towards a socially just and environmentally sustainable economic system (Dörry and Schultz, 2017).

Divergence from mainstream economic arrangements is an integral part not only in how these practices are organised but also in how they are interpreted and narrated. Participants of alternative economies can be assumed to have a more or less articulated idea of what particular aspects of the (socio-)economic practices they wish to see emphasised or transformed. Researching these self-understandings expands the epistemological imagination on the porous boundaries of "the economic" and encourages a deeper analysis of alternative economic practices (cf. Jonas, 2013).Yet this intentional character of alternatives does not mean that such systems would completely deviate from the mainstream or function on an inverse logic. Instead of thinking through binarities (alternative *or* mainstream), alternative economies can be positioned in a continuum: some aim more deliberately at political transformation; some are more embedded in a given community; some pose their alternative by constructing new currency systems; some seek forms of collaboration without currency-mediated exchange (Eskelinen, Hirvilammi & Venäläinen , 2020). The position of a given system on the continuum is subject to change at any time, as the objectives of alternative systems are ultimately determined by the people involved. Further, despite the original intentions, an alternative economy might gradually develop into an unexpected direction.

Cases

The two examined cases – ridesharing and timebanking – serve as examples of alternative economies with notable similarities but also with critical differences. The cases were studied in context of the research project "Rights, exclusion and the social production of value within organisations of the new economy" in which both authors participated. The authors' own positionality with the cases ranges from long-term participant observation (Eskelinen, timebanks) to a more

distanced research setting with an online survey and non-participatory quantitative and qualitative data collection (Venäläinen, ridesharing)

Ridesharing: self-organised mobility through Facebook groups

The first case concerns self-organised ridesharing in Finnish Facebook groups. While ridesharing has a long history with various social, cultural, economic and political motivations (Chan and Shaheen, 2012), it has recently experienced a revival in a somewhat novel form along with the surge of social media. In the discussed form, a driver who is willing to take additional passengers posts an announcement to a local or route-specific Facebook group, providing the details of the itinerary and possibly mentioning the price asked for the ride. The persons interested in taking the ride post a reply to the thread or contact the driver directly through a private message. Typically, while not universally, the passenger is expected to pay a small fee as agreed with the driver in advance. In the typologies of shared mobility (Handke and Jonuschat, 2012; Shaheen and Cohen, 2019), this form of ridesharing, which has grown its popularity in Finland in the 2010s, can be described as social media based, informal and incidental, pre-arranged not-for-profit carpooling.

Social media based ridesharing can be seen as slightly exceptional in contrast to the recent trajectories of the "sharing economy" (Sundararajan, 2016; John, 2017) where the sharing of services and things increasingly takes place at dedicated for-profit platforms with their proprietary mobile apps. In contrast, the organisation of ridesharing groups in Finland has remained markedly decentralised. At the time of data collection (2017), there were about 160 groups serving different cities and route combinations. As a whole, ridesharing groups can be seen as an organically growing network of "commons-based peer production" (Benkler, 2006; Papadimitropoulos, 2018) or even as an emerging "transport commons" that challenges the customary forms of public transport (Venäläinen, 2020).

Timebanks: co-production and empowerment within local communities

Timebanks are community exchange systems which materialise the radically egalitarian ideas that everyone's time is of equal value and that everyone has

skills valuable to the community. Their distinct value conception is institutionalised in the medium of exchange used for transactions – the time currency (Eskelinen, 2020). Each timebank has an internal accounting system and a digital notice board for announcements. Members announce their skills and needs on the notice boards, and when an exchange between two members takes place, the number of hours used to deliver the service is credited from the recipient and debited to the provider. While the sum of the whole accounting system always balances at zero, individuals can have negative or positive balances up to an agreed limit.

Timebanks function in the intersection of community development and alternative economies. The services offered range from casual neighbourly help to high-skill professional activities. Timebanks are based on the idea of "co-producing" services (Boyle and Harris, 2009; Glynos and Speed, 2012) and emphasise social interaction and empowerment. While not creating any "net worth" as measurable by GDP or other formal indicators, they arguably generate wellbeing through service provision, communal interaction, and social recognition. Organisationally and ideologically, they challenge traditional dichotomies such as commercial/voluntary, exchange/mutual aid and activism/service provision (Eskelinen, 2018).

Timabanks were initiated in the US and have assumed somewhat different forms in different societal contexts (Collom, 2007; Gregory, 2012; Diprose, 2015; Eskelinen, 2018). In Finland, timebanks hardly existed before the inception of the Helsinki Timebank in 2009, even though sporadic attempts to build similar systems had been initiated earlier. In its decade of operation, Helsinki Timebank has become a relatively large timebank with membership counted in thousands. Theoretically, there are several other timebanks in the country, but most have very limited activity. Helsinki Timebank's currency unit for one hour is called "tovi" (Finnish for "a moment"). The reaction of authorities to the timebank has been mixed: while encouraged as communal activity, the tax authorities have seen service delivery in *tovis* as suspect (Eskelinen, 2018).

Data and methods

The analysed data was collected from discussions in relevant Facebook groups for studied ridesharing and timebanking communities. In formulating the strategy for data collection, the aim was to collect and identify discussions between the participants of these economic communities that express *moments of negotiation* (cf. Miller, 2013) about the economic moralities of the practice. While the everyday life of alternative economies tends to focus on moderating the practicalities of exchange, moments of negotiation refer to the relatively rare events where the participants have had the chance to openly discuss how they perceive the underlying normative commitments of their activities.

Debates about core principles, let alone ethical or political perspectives, are not very common within ridesharing groups, and they might even be explicitly discouraged. Timebanks, while in principle encouraging discussion, also tend to stick to formal communication in their fora, particularly in the digital exchange platform which only allows ”wanted/needed” announcements. Because of the limited possibilities for discussion about the fundamental principles, even a small set of conversations is fruitful in outlining the different economic moralities. While interviews could have helped to deepen the insights about the participants' self-understandings, it is also valuable to study the conversations as they appear in a more spontaneous form, from the initiative of the participants themselves and without an intervention by the researchers.

The analysed material consists of three datasets. The first dataset contains three conversations that took place in 2014–15 in Finland's largest ridesharing Facebook group (with ca. 45,000 members at the time of data collection). The collected posts (n=380) discuss 1) the acceptability of asking for “a couple of euros” for the ride as “something for one's pains”; 2) participants' understandings about the total costs of owning and driving a car; and 3) how much the members have asked as a payment for a ride. The second dataset contains two conversations from Helsinki Timebank's public Facebook group. The collected posts (n=ca. 100) discuss whether there is a need to determine a euro value for *tovi*, and if so, what would be the appropriate value. All Facebook discussions were initiated spontaneously by individual members of the groups without involvement of the researchers. The data has been anonymised when collected for analysis. The third dataset, which supplements

the analysis for the timebanking case, is a member survey (n=ca. 170) for Helsinki Timebank members in 2014, carried out by Teppo Eskelinen. The data analysed from the survey are to the question: "What, if anything, has the timebank provided you, which is not nor cannot be provided by the market or public services?"

After collection, the material was coded and categorised (Given, 2008) to identify recurring attitudes, conceptions and normative ideals related to the roles of money (in the ridesharing case) and to the uniqueness of the tovi currency (in the timebanking case). This process of *theory-guided qualitative content analysis* (Krippendorff, 2013; Schreier, 2012) alternated between inductive (data-driven) and deductive (theory-driven) phases. The first phase of analysis resulted in a set of principles which correlate to the economic moralities prevalent within the practices. In the second phase of the analysis, these principles were categorised according to Gibson-Graham's (2006) tripartite categorisation of market, alternative market and non-market transactions. In line with Gibson-Graham's perspective, we do not understand the categorisation as a rigid representation of how the economic moralities are structured in the practice itself but rather as a heuristic attempt to "construct a language" (ibid., pp. 53–78) for mapping diversity. Gibson-Graham describes these categories as "ways of negotiating commensurability" (ibid., pp. 60). While market transactions are chacterised by rule-based exchange, a notion of equivalence and hierarchical regulation, in alternative market, commensurability is "socially negotiated" and exchange occurs through "local and personalized agreements". Finally, in the non-market transactions, there are no rules of commensurability nor formal calculation – instead of exchange, they are about sharing, giving and taking. (Ibid., pp. 60–62.) Extending upon the icecberg metaphor discussed earlier, the market exchanges in the tip of the iceberg comprise only a small part of the economic transactions, while the large submerged part conceals a multitude of different alternative market and non-market transactions.

Results

Ridesharing: flexibility in roles of money

Table 1 presents the identified principles regarding the ”just price” and motivations of participating in ridesharing.

***** INSERT TABLE 1 HERE *****

In the ”tip of the economic iceberg”, that is, acccording to the market logic, ridesharing is seen as a transaction where the buyer and seller agree a price contractually, just as in the trade of any other commodified service. From this perspective, the question of ”just price” is tautological, since any price agreed by the driver and passenger without coercion is correct by definition. However, also a notion of ”objective” pricing within market principles can be discerned in the data. This means justifying the price by referring to the actual expenses incurred to the driver – typically the cost of fuel, but sometimes also including other expenses of owning and driving a car.

In the ”submerged part of the iceberg”, the alternative market and non-market principles partially question the notion that the price of a ride could be determined in a simple equation of supply and demand or by determining the ”real costs”. The category of alternative market includes principles that call for flexibility and contextual decision-making (*pay what you want*, *pay what you can*) but also bind the process of price-setting to an assumedly shared normative basis. This economic morality calls for *judiciousness with price*, discouraging both profit-seeking (from the part of the driver) and taking advantage of the driver (from the part of the passenger). In the non-market principles, the importance of payment is more fundamentally questioned. While the advocates of these principles might still ask and pay money for rides, they emphasise that ridesharing should not be a business but rather proclaim *ecological values*, *sociability*, *helping out others* and *a sense of community*.

Different principles are potentially overlapping and dissonant. For instance, the principles of *individualism* and *contractuality* may easily converge, but it is more problematic to jot together the principles of *helping out others* and *opposing freeriding*, or combining *paying what one wants* to *“objective” pricing*. This complex mesh of economic moralities corresponds to Gibson-Graham’s notion of the

large submerged part of economic practices that is overshadowed by the simplifying accounts of markets. A figure that would better do justice to the multiplicity of economic rationalities in ridesharing would have to blur the boundaries between the three categories of transactions and accept that they are complexly intertwined.

Using money (euros) as a medium of exchange is rarely questioned. Rather, it is a standard expectation that the ridetaker pays at least a nominal fee. The difference between the three categories lies more in how the *function* and *significance* of money and the appropriate *process of negotiating* the price are conceived. In the market principles, the ride is first and foremost understood as a service the value of which should *equal* the payment. Like a person who would buy a ticket to a train or to a bus, the relation between the ridetaker and the ridegiver is understood to be settled after the transaction where the promised service has been delivered for the equally valuable payment. Afterwards, neither party is supposed to be left indebted nor in a debt of gratitude. The morality of market principles is based on what could be called an *ethos of clearing,* which implies that an ideal transaction leaves no unresolved commitments, neither material nor moral, between the parties (cf. Graeber 2014). Connected to this, there is a discourse that directly questions the idea that there could even theoretically be a communal standard of pricing:

> I think it gets too complicated if you start to think about the price in too much detail. [...]. Just settle it with mutually with the driver, vice versa, and that's it." (FB/2/11, translated from Finnish)

At the other extreme, the non-market principles, payment in euros is seen as incommensurable with the "real" value – or better, *values* in plural – of ridesharing. The payment may be used by convention or to express gratitude to the driver, but not as a means of clearing the transaction. In the non-market views, ridesharing is fundamentally seen as an ethical community which seeks to *help out others*. Everyone in this community bound together by a collective moral obligation is then under a "permanent mutual debt" (Graeber, 2014, p. 71). Articulations of non-market principles often point to a non-instrumental perspective where seeking profit from another's need would be seen as inappropriate:

> It feels like the nitpickers in this group have lost this certain principle of communality […] like that you do something together, and then at the same time, both will get something for themselves, like a good mood, a little bit of money for gasoline, or nice companion. […] You don't have to take ridesharers, if the motive is to make them pay for the expenses of your car. (FB/1/33, translated from Finnish)

The middle category, alternative market, is a hybrid of the two polarities. It is characterised by a high degree of flexibility in accepting the potential tensions between the different logics of valuation and different practices of exchange. For example, paying for a ride may be seen as important as such, but the *amount* of payment can be considered as being of secondary importance. Answering the question ”How much have you asked for a ride?”, a member of the group writes:

> I have always written in my posts that a passanger may decide to pay or not to pay a sum of his/her choice. Every time so far someone in the car has paid something, but my principle is that if someone needs a ride but doesn't have money, they can still join in. (FB/2/150, translated from Finnish)

In the moralities of alternative market, is also accepted that the payment may depend on what the ridetaker wants to pay or is able to pay, and also on what the party offering the ride considers “reasonable”. This, again, emphasises the point that the mere act of paying something – that is, transferring money from person to another – should not be conflated with the often related but disparate event of paying *for* something, where the payment equals the value of a thing or a service. ”Clearing” is only one possible function of a payment.

Even though there is a widely shared understanding that the ridegiver should receive some money for taking the additional passenger(s), there is little support for the idea that the driver would be allowed to “make the passengers pay their costs of driving” (as phrased in one argument). Thus, the judiciousness in pricing that is expected in the alternative market arguments calls for a price that provides “something for one’s pains” for the driver but never exceeds or even attemps to match the total expenses of driving and

owning a car, let alone the real or hypothetical market price of a corresponding service. In some arguments, the payment acquires a nearly symbolic function where the act of paying (regardless of the amount paid) expresses commitment to fulfilling the common objective of getting affordably and conveniently from place to another. Such payment is not a payment *for* a "service", but a symbolic gesture to show that the ridetaker is not freeriding.

Timebanks: value as "euro value" and "beyond euro value"

Timebanks are positioned in the somewhat ambiguous terrain between exchange and community activism, seeing themselves as a "currency commons" or as self-governed currency systems. While promoting a unique conception of value and functioning solely on the basis of time-based accounting, timebanks can be in some contexts forced to consider the value of time in their accounting in relation to the mainstream capitalist currency. This occurred with the Helsinki timebank when the Finnish tax office announced that timebank exhanges are liable to taxation and require taxes paid in euros (e.g. Joutsenvirta, 2016). There have also been conversions between timebanking systems with different kinds of units, requiring some kind of estimate to be set on the value of the units, which potentially leads to using euro-valued estimations to facilitate the conversion. Finally, the timebank is frequently used as a "flea market", creating the need to determine correct prices for goods without an obvious time value.

Such instances provoke discussions, or moments of negotiation. As opposed to ridesharing, such negotiations concern exactly the value and essence of the medium of exchange, rather than its function: to what extent *tovi* is seen as "convertible" to euro and to what extent as necessarily embodying inconvertible non-market values? Time bank activists have varying positions on the issue. For example, taxation is not generally opposed as such, but has been seen as a process which would impose a value form that contradicts with the egalitarian essence of the time currency (Eskelinen, Kovanen and van der Wekken, 2017). In the Helsinki timebank member survey, all but nine respondents saw that the conversion to be at least highly difficult, or outright impossible. Also in the other analysed dataset, comments viewing this conversion as outright nonproblematic were scarce.

However, the data on timebanking included also expressions of market principles. These were typically expressed by reference to timebanks as a means to *save money*. Respondents referred to "a service you don't need to pay for"; expensive services "which don't cost a thousand when my monthly income is five hundred"; or "flexible and individualised services" – all reflecting market values. Such comments were often made by respondents who generally saw joining the timebank as a very practical matter. A market-oriented logic is also materialised in the "flea market" function of timebanks, which means that timebanks tend to attract people to buy and sell second-hand goods in time currency. This second-hand goods trade opens the value of *tovi* to "market negotiation", replacing the strictly objective and egalitarian yardstick of time. This makes room for negotiation over prices, their adjustment and "price signals" of various kinds. Noteworthily, it is often exactly in the context of trading tangible goods where the conversion issue comes forth.

In several comments within the data, conversion to euro was framed as a *practical issue*, which can be interpreted as leaning towards the market, as conversion technically allows any timebanking activity to be valued in euro. In other words, while euro and *tovi* value were seen as theoretically incommensurable, some situations were seen as requiring conversion, as noted above. The Helsinki timebank *has* used a rate of conversion in the instance of joining the global Community Exchange System which requires a conversion of value between different timebanking systems in order to operate on the same platform. This was argued to be necessary in order to "set some standard". Also, in an earlier merger of local timebanks with a different units of accounting, there was an estimated euro value used for converging the accounting systems. Curiously, *tovi* (one hour) was defined as approximately 20 euros in the former process and 10 euros in the latter, pointing again to the difficulty of determining the correct "euro value".

There are two other discernible arguments in the data that express the idea of conversion as a practical necessity. First, in some arguments it is pointed out that delivering a service valued in *tovi*s may generate expenses in euros: for example, when purchasing a bus ticket or necessary tools. As an answer to the question of whether such expenses should be compensated in tovis or euros, *tovi* was the typical answer, which actually implies convertibility. Second, in

some comments, the question of convertability was not problematised as such but rather the approach was to approximate a figure which could be used if the need for conversion would occur. Examples such comments include: “I have intuitively thought of about 10 e” or “20 e means definitely rounding it up”.

The data also contains a variety of arguments that express *alternative market* principles. In the member survey, such principles were expressed in a variety of descriptions of timebanking as a qualitatively or ethically superior form of exchange in comparison to formal market exchange (for exchange as transformation, see Gregory, 2015). The respondents argued, for example, that in timebanks, there is “a feeling of interacting with a real human being rather than a service provider devoid of identity”, that the timebank enables ”non-bureaucratic exchange without the false categorisation of work inputs as valuable and non-valuable” and that the "relationship [between the buyer and the seller] is more relaxed [because] you don’t have to think whether the service provider is exploited”.

Some comments display an attempt to articulate the ethical and normative spirit of timebanks in euro standard. This can be seen as an expression of an alternative economy logic that retains some commensurability with the formal currency. These ideas were often expressed with strong reservations, and the key point was to affirm equality as the timebank’s core value: “If everyone’s time if of equal worth, then tovi should correspond with minimum wage if anything.” Here, the reasoning takes non-market values as the starting point and then, from this basis, draws an interpretation of conversion logic for exchange. The discussions on possible expenses incurred in euros reflect a similar mindset: there is room for market value, but mostly in activating and enabling the alternative market.

In some of the comments, there was an insistence on the *complementary nature of timebanks*. It was emphasised that timebanks do not operate in a sphere comparable with commercial services but generate unique kinds of goods: more personal, community-based and authentic. This is in line with a common sentiment in timebanking literature which emphasises community rather than economic alternatives (e.g. Seyfang and Smith, 2002). From this perspective, *tovi*s and euros are incommensurable, since they are used to exchange and

encourage the production of different kinds of goods. This makes the very question of conversion unintelligible: "We should keep in mind that the markets do not produce most of our services".

Non-market ideas are then typically notions of timebanking as a unique kind of practice. They see the timebank as an embodiment of a "community spirit" or as a form of altruism rather than having anything to do with market exchange. This sentiment is frequently repeated in the member survey: the members write about "getting to know your neighbours", "feeling of community", "genuine encounters between equals", "sense of belonging", "community, friendship and discussions", and "meeting new people". The timebank, despite its role as an alternative exchange system, is seen by many members as an *anti-market* system that – despite the importance of the common time currency – points outside of exchange. Indeed, at the time of carrying out the member survey, the timebank had several members who had problems using their accumulated *tovis*, as they felt awkward about someone serving them.

***** INSERT TABLE 2 HERE *****

While timebanks are undoubtedly most often seen as alternative markets, their economic moralities include elements from all of Gibson-Graham's (2006) three categories. Sometimes participants' ideas of the practice are expressed on fairly mainstream market terms, while at the other end, even the idea of alternative market is sometimes seen as too "commercial" by participants who emphasise altruism and the community spirit.

Conclusions

We started this article by arguing that the economy should be seen as significantly more diverse than capitalist exchange. This implies a need to theorise this diversity, but also to note how intentionally constructed alternatives involve explicit ideas of non-capitalist valuation and continuous negotiation over forms of value. Above, we have examined two such alternatives – ridesharing and timebanking – from the perspective of their *economic moralities*: that is, how the participants of self-organised alternative economies reflect the purposes and normative commitments of these practices.

The analysis was based on studying specific *moments of negotiation* in which the debate on economic moralities is explicitly opened to discussion. In the analysis, the principles articulated in the discussions were categorised by using Gibson-Graham's (2006) division to market, alternative market and non-market transactions. Alternative economies might readily seem to fit in the middle category of alternative market, but as demonstrated in the analysis, such practices also lean towards market and non-market forms.

The analysis shows that the moments of negotiation about the underlying principles of alternative economies should not be understood as a simple collision of mutually exclusive ideas, but rather as a perpetual and complex process of balancing between overlapping and partly incommensurable principles. While self-organised alternative economies might appear as functionally uniform at the level of their everyday operations, they still provide considerable leeway for heterogeneous economic moralities and logics of valuation. Therefore, we suggest that a proper understanding of such systems entails perceiving them as involving various overlapping and partly incommensurable economic moralities.

There are similarities but also critical differences between economic moralities of the two analysed cases. The overarching objective and principle of operation in both systems is largely the same: the need to match needs and capacities/skills, and the necessity to negotiate over the expression of value and of the process where the need is satisfied. Following the typology by Duncan Fuller and Andrew Jonas (2013), both timebanking and ridesharing vacillate between the functions of *substitutive* and *additional* alternatives: they do not directly confront capitalism but either correct its malfuctions (substitution) or create new post-capitalist spaces of action (addition). (See also Sánchez-Hernández and Glückler 2019.) The key difference is that in timebanking, the basis of its "alternativeness" is in its medium of exchange (the time currency *tovi*), whereas in ridesharing, the official currency (euro) is readily accepted, while not simply as a "price" but for many and more nuanced functions. Also, while timebanks express a more explicitly alternative value basis (also in terms of alternatives *to capitalism*), ridesharing is more easily understood as *quiet activism* (Pottinger, 2018) which is not "grandiosely" antagonistic but rather mundane and implicitly political.

Both attract new functions that involve a given tension with their founding principles: for example, selling second-hand goods in timebanks and reselling bus and train tickets in ridesharing groups. Still, these systems also embody economic logics that clearly deviate from the strictly calculative rationality attributed to market exchange. In timebanks, the non-market element is best seen in their complementary function: *tovi*s can be used to exchange things external to markets. In ridesharing, non-market matters relate to a "sense of community" and a general sense of ethical conduct ("helping out people") or what anthropologist David Graeber (2014) calls "baseline communism".

While previous research has already shown that alternative economies entail ongoing negotiations with the wider society (Cooper, 2013; Diprose, 2015; Joutsenvirta, 2016), our analysis emphasises that it is also the very fundamental economic moralities *within* and *between* the alternative economies that are in a sustained tension. Despite an ostensibly fixed logic of organisation, various economic moralities exist within alternative economies in an intertwined and also potentially changing manner. This is also why such alternatives are interesting objects of study for understanding and affirming economic diversity. As important as it is not to reify concepts such as *a* "capitalist logic" (in singular), it has to be stressed that the alternativeness of alternative economies should also be recognised as plural. Ideally, the recognition of this plurality would extend beyond research to popular discourse, allowing to see both the existence of alternatives, the general versatility of all economic, and the potentially changing nature of economic value.

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[will be added after de-anonymisation]

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