Solidarity and reciprocity in times of recession.
Understanding the old and new values in late capitalism

The financial crisis and its consequences in European societies show the weaknesses of the current economic system. Especially in the so-called peripheral countries we can notice a dramatic increasing in unemployment, reduced public spending and security, poverty, evictions, etc. The neoliberal policy followed by most European governments offers little chance for a solution to this problem.

To overcome the economic problems some people are recalling and establishing different models of production, supply, distribution, and consumption which are often and generally referred to as alternative or community oriented economic, also human economies. The establishment of such modern organizations gives rise to two problems: first, that the current economic situation is perceived as historically specific and unique, and/or, secondly, that their promoters neglect the historical or geographical conditions of the appearance and existence of various economic and decision-making models.

Anthropologists have long reported about internal balance, reciprocity and “social security” in a number of non-European and preindustrial communities which have been by default referred to in the west as archaic and integrated into the global capitalist social system that is based on technology, population growth and urban concentration, global trade and privatization of gains. Anthropologists initially used the expertise of bourgeois sociology, political science and economics, eventually altered some of their fundamental assumptions, and tried to develop a universal knowledge of Man. An anthropological interest in the various (small) communities can certainly contribute to diversification, democratization and humanization of economics. But when archaeology and historical anthropology are brought into the discussion, we recognize how today we tend to think of the state and economic crisis only in the framework of post-French-Revolution society, even though the bourgeois state’s evolution has a much longer history. City states, for example, are historically connected with agriculture, civilizations and social hierarchies.

Taking into account the diversity of human natural conditions and historical shifts in the political and economic conditions (hegemonies and their alternatives), we realise that the phenomenon of group belonging and sharing of resources is much
older than the idea of solidarity, the promise of French Revolution ("fraternity"). Solidarity was defined theoretically by sociology (G. Simmel, F. Tönnies, E. Durkheim, M. Weber, and K. Marx).

The basic social unit of European preindustrial societies was the family and the extended family. Those links were the foundation of the exchange of goods, services and loyalty, moral commitments, etc. Outside the kinships in technologically simpler feudal societies, mutual aid was regular between farmers when constructing houses, working the fields, etc. Neighbours in towns took care of each other’s children, helped in covering the costs of funerals, or planned projects that were of interest to the neighbourhood. Craftsmen assembled in the guilds, recruited apprentices, organized their education, and set up security funds, etc. Fathers and critics of “bourgeois sociology” defined cohesion and solidarity at the time of the formation of national states and of the emerging class struggle in the 19th century. The class solidarity of the industrial proletariat of the 19th century contributed to the formation of (national) welfare states in the latter half of the 20th century.

The second problem with the promotion of “alternative models” is the often-vague language of their proponents. It is time to rethink analytical categories and concepts used in (economic) anthropology in order to surpass the local interaction and enrich the wider theoretical discussions on the modern revival of economic communitarianism. Though solidarity is mentioned in some academic, political and religious narratives, anthropology never definitively adopted this concept. Instead anthropology eventually developed the concept of reciprocity and mutuality – social relations along the processes of (material) exchanges (B. Malinowski, M. Mauss, K. Polanyi, M. Sahlins, S. Narotzky). The gift had a very special role as ethnographic evidence in the relativization of market-oriented, selfish and atomised individuals. Therefore anthropology is able to add many new examples of shared economies: hunters and gatherers, herders, tribal communities, etc. The anthropological contribution to the scope of reciprocity, solidarity and belonging is twofold: temporally, whereby anthropology goes back into history and (often speculatively) into the archaeological past to make it easier to understand the present and human patterns in general; and spatially, because anthropology is interested in close and distant identities not only in a (respected) society which is wrongly equated in the social sciences with the nation-state. The various forms of collective identities and communalisms in anthropology are a logical consequence of its epistemology – communities/cultures, their beliefs and behaviours, which often get in the way of hegemonic logics and practices. Anthropology and ethnology were, in the 20th century, always somewhat archaic, left on the imperial and heritage edge of core social sciences.
The concept of solidarity includes, in short, mechanisms of redistribution through taxes, charity, altruism and political ideology which alleviate material inequality resulting from socio-economic stratification. Through solidarity it is impossible to establish an equivalent relationship between donor and recipient, and it is necessary to charge state or other remote institutions with carrying out redistribution: social policy, concessions, grants, funds, food, clothes, social entrepreneurship, sponsorship, NGOs, etc. Sociology based on the Marxist tradition has been rejecting the perpetuation and masking of the fundamental economic, social and political inequalities, but has remained restrained by national society/state and its global setting. Reciprocity in this regard is the domain of (economic) anthropology. In terms of the history of sociological theory, reciprocity fits more within the framework of “organic community” (Tönnies: *Gemeinschaft*) or “mechanical solidarity” (Durkheim: division of work). The division between anthropology and sociology looks at the (evolutionary) relation between the micro-social level (family, community, small scale, face to face, etc.) and the macro-social level (national, global). Sharp division, however, is not possible, because in both scientific disciplines there are many initiatives to overcome the boundaries: sociologists are concerned with the problems of the family, village communities, and diverse groups of interest, and anthropologists regularly do evaluate nations, states and global systems.

Processes of reciprocity and solidarity are still important in the households, kinships, fraternities, lodges, guilds, agrarian communities, villages, municipalities, neighbourhoods, states, religious communities, family enterprises, cooperatives, unions, universities, factories, communes, in fair trade, clubs, squats, gardening communities, collaborative consumption, local money, universal basic income, and in the ideas of the new Slovenian left, etc. Also, an important part of corporate business is of course based on specific internal solidarity and reciprocity. However, the implementation and the quality of the cooperation, reciprocity, solidarity and belonging varies from case to case, which is to be considered when developing a theory and practice of shared economy.

These were some basic assumptions for the first seminar of the Network of Anthropology of Economy held in Barcelona in February 2014. It was probably not a coincidence that the initiators of the seminar came from three European countries which have been strongly affected by the latest economic crisis: Hugo Valenzuela from Spain, Patty A. Gray from Ireland and Peter Simonič from Slovenia. Because of the novelty of the Network and partly maybe because of the implied political and economic mission, the seminar was not attended by established names in economic anthropology. But the number of doctoral students in anthropology present at the seminar gave the impression that the theme speaks to the generational turn in a
times of crisis in the social welfare state, and that anthropological theory of economy pragmatically is shifting into activism among young and unemployed anthropologists. Some of the seminar participants wrote an article for this edition of *Ars & Humanitas*. The second group of articles comes from Slovenian authors, mainly from the field of anthropology, but also from sociology and political science. They were invited to encourage discussion of the theory of the (economic) grounds of community and society at home.

This volume presents a wide range of views on different cases of solidarity and reciprocity. Some of them are a response to the main issues of the Barcelona Conference, as they analyse the formation and functioning of various communities in the past and in the present (M. E. Santana, B. Kravanja, D. Podjed, J. Repič, P. Simonič). The second group of articles addresses indirect responses and thoughts on the latest global economic crisis (R. Alquézar, C. Toplak, I. Sabaté, N. Vodopivec, V. Korošec). All contributions are in a way devoted to participation and economic democracy, which is offered to us as a cure for apathy and consumerism, and as a solution against the manipulations of political and economic elites in centralized systems.