Scaling Up or Deepening? Developing the Radical Potential of the SSE Sector in a Time of Crisis

Paul Chatterton
University of Leeds,
UK

Ana C. Dinerstein
University of Bath
UK

Peter North
University of Liverpool
UK (Corresponding author)

Frederick Harry Pitts
University of Bristol
UK

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**Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals:
What Role for Social and Solidarity Economy?**

Abstract

In this paper, we suggest that not enough attention is being paid to the place of political contestation and antagonism in terms of how SDGs are being rolled out as part of a broader consensual, liberal geo-politics under conditions of contemporary neoliberal capitalism. In particular, we argue for more consideration of the significance of the SSE as way to achieve the SDGs through responding to a broader crisis of social reproduction and work where millions of people cannot live with dignity, and looming climate crisis is not addressed. We want to foreground that the SSE is offering novel and tangible alternative forms of social production, useful work and means of the social reproduction of life beyond the current capitalist crisis that are being developed from the grassroots up, and which represent a challenge to conceptions of the SDGs as a policy prescription or mobilising utopia within an overall framework of neoliberal globalism. Consequently, we argue for policy in support of the SSEs that facilitates, rather than tames, these radical grassroots critiques and for the development of an autonomous, meso-civil society SSE sector.

Keywords

Antagonism, Concrete Utopia, Dignity, Policy, Prefiguration, Social Movements, Translation

Bio

Paul Chatterton is a writer, researcher and campaigner and currently Professor of Urban Futures in the School of Geography. His recent books include *Low Impact Living* published by Routledge and *Unlocking Sustainable Cities* with Pluto Press.

Ana Cecilia Dinerstein is a Reader in Sociology at the University of Bath, United Kingdom. She is a critical theorist and activist. Her critical research on the Global Politics of Hope explores the contradictory and creative processes of social change led by social movements. Her publications include The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America: the Art of Organising Hope (2015) and Social Sciences for An Other Politics. Women Theorising with-out Parachutes (2016). Her edited collection Open Marxism 4: Against a Closing World, Pluto Press (with John Holloway) is forthcoming in November 2019.

Peter North is Professor of Alternative Economies at the University of Liverpool, with an interest in how people can live with dignity and justice in the Anthropocene. With Molly Scott Cato he recently edited the collection *Towards Just and Sustainable Economies: the Social and Solidarity Economy North and South* published by The Policy Press in 2017.

Frederick Harry Pitts is Lecturer in Management at the University of Bristol, where he leads the Faculty Research Group for Perspectives on Work and co-edits the Bristol University Press online magazine *Futures of Work*. He is author of *Critiquing Capitalism Today: New Ways to Read Marx* (Palgrave 2017) and, with Matt Bolton, *Corbynism: A Critical Approach* (Emerald 2018).

Introduction

In this paper, we offer a critical approach to the potential contribution of the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in relation to combatting poverty, inequality, dangerous climate change and environmental degradation, whilst securing prosperity with peace and justice.   We argue that while there has been undoubted progress in some levels in combatting absolute poverty since the turn of the millennium, a blanket assessment of the (very welcome) number of people taken out of absolute poverty diverts attention away from quality of life *beyond* mere subsistence in a monetised world. Our position is that the SDGs are presented as abstract market utopias that remain disconnected from concrete struggles around the social reproduction of life.

We suggest that not enough attention is being paid to considering the place of antagonism in challenging the extreme elements of contemporary neoliberal capitalism. We argue that while the goals represent, on one level, an admirable if post-political (Swyngedouw, 2010) 'mobilising utopia' of a world without poverty, patriarchal relations and environmental degradation, they disregard the complex dynamics surrounding the struggle through which this world is attained. We challenge conceptualisations of the goals as simply a guide to action leading to an inclusive but overarching destination. Rather we suggest that a liberal conception of cultural diversity within hegemonic market economics can obscure the complexity of coloniality and the hierarchies of power which 'other' non-capitalist cultures are subordinated to. We argue for non-capitalocentric, decolonial and antipatriarchal conceptions that see neoliberal economics as but one possible future (Gibson-Graham, 2008) – and, we argue, not a desirable one. In contrast, we advocate more consideration of the significance of the SSE as way to achieve the SDGs through responding to a broader crisis of social reproduction and work (Zechner and Hansen 2015) by virtue of which millions of people cannot live with dignity, and the looming climate crisis lies unaddressed. We want to foreground that the SSE is offering novel and tangible alternative forms of useful work and the production and reproduction of the means of living beyond and not simply within the current capitalist crisis.

Consequently, we do not uncritically assume that the key task is to examine how the SSE can be scaled up and mainstreamed, its impact enhanced, and its potential moved from the incremental to the transformative (Utting, 2015). We would like to advance a fourfold conceptualization of the social and solidarity economy (SSE) sector (North and Cato 2017:6-8) in order to understand which elements of the sector specifically contribute to the SDGs in terms of the creation of economically just and sustainable economies, which are merely palliative, which contribute to increased wage slavery. Distinctions are drawn between (1) assumptions that the place of the SSE is to use 'enterprise' to do 'good' (as per social enterprise and microcredit) or (2) to transform the ability of those currently left out of neoliberal economics to be included (as per Work Integration Social Enterprises). We would argue that what they are 'left out' of or 'behind' is capitalist wage slavery or 'enterprise culture'. We differentiate these integrationist or neoliberal models with (3) the solidarity, community or diverse economy, focusing on how we want to live with dignity in the Anthropocene; and (4) the antagonistic economy, challenging (particularly Anglo-Saxon) neoliberalism's malignant effects (North and Cato, 2017:6-8). The SSE sector is a site of innovation and contestation in which actually-existing varieties of non-capitalist market economies are being developed which, their protagonists claim, show that 'another world is possible'. We wish to strengthen those parts of the SSE that are more 'promethean' than neoliberal Trojan horse or Frankenstein (McMurtry, 2015)

We argue that the SSE's transformational potential needs to be understood in the nuanced, concrete ways it emerges in different places with different histories, geographies, resources and cultures. We want to develop better analytical insights into how the transformative potential of the SSE can be harnessed to an alternative political project. We argue less for scaling up, and more for combatting tendencies towards isomorphism (Utting, 2018) through *deepening* the SSE with closer connection to grassroots practices that strengthen the ability of its participants to explore how to live with the dignity given that too many people, especially in the global South, cannot. Embracing struggles and 'concrete utopias' (Dinerstein, 2015) prefigured in the here and now, these grassroots practices strengthen the ability of their participants to produce the changes necessary to live well and with justice, *and* expose the SDGs as at best mobilising utopias to be attained in the future. We doubt that the goals can be attained in their entirety given a capitalist, colonial and patriarchal society structured by unequal and extractive core-periphery relations. We argue instead for two important elements of the struggle for alternative forms of social reproduction.

First, space must be made for SSE experiments in what is variously called the solidarity, community or diverse economy that focus on how we live with dignity in the Anthropocene, and for those elements of the SSE fighting against or creating alternatives to the more pathological elements of (particularly Anglo-Saxon) neoliberal capitalism – this we call the *antagonistic* economy. These experiments, we argue, should *not* be scaled up from above or from outside, but left alone – the revolution will not be funded (INCITE!, 2007). Second, where there *are* supportive policy makers who want to work with grassroots actors on their, not policy makers, terms, we propose a process of *prefigurative translation* (Dinerstein, 2017) through which the prefigurative elements of these experiments in 'concrete utopias' are translated into policy in ways that support rather than erase, obscure or channel their transformative nature or the alternatives they represent into safer, more domesticated paths in tune with neoliberal nostrums. In order to explore the possibilities for this it is necessary to consider how grassroots SSE actors negotiate terrains of action where they balance antagonistic and radical strategies for change aimed at rupture with more symbiotic and interstitial ones (Wright, 2010). Rather than explaining this contradiction through a normative commitment to 'scaling up', we employ the notion of the 'concrete utopia' to capture the practical and conceptual bridge linking SSE experiments and the utopian spirit of the SDGs in which the role of policy is to support and nurture, not tame or translate, the utopian spirit of the SSE.

Drawing on selected case studies from across the global North and South, we present three dimensions of how concrete experiments deepen the SSE by 'taking back' (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013) space in which to develop alternatives. We frame our argument around Polanyi's three fictitious factors of capital. The first is *land*, which we will explore with reference to the common ownership of the housing built on it via eco and collaborative housing schemes. The second is *labour*, which we will explore with reference to the development of socially-useful production and useful work as opposed to alienated toil through worker cooperation and ownership independent of capital and state. The third is *finance*, which we will explore with reference to forms of money and finance that pose alternatives to the 'violence of economic stability'. We discuss ways that these concrete utopias can disrupt and contribute to policy in ways that identify and break through barriers to business-as-usual pro-growth economics and politics. In this way, we move the question from 'how can we scale up the SSE' to 'how can we – as both activists and sympathetic policy makers - work to develop its transformative potential through deepening grassroots practices in ways that are transformative, collaborative and compassionate'.

(1) Land - developing common ownership of housing

One of the fundamental aspects that underpin human flourishing is the control of land, and especially housing and shelter that are built upon them. In particular, we argue that the key to building a functioning social and solidarity economy is establishing an ecohousing commons that responds to both climate breakdown and the deep social injustice and dysfunction built into contemporary global housing markets. Below, we reflect on a number of examples from the community level which are developing antagonistic forms of housing beyond the business-as-usual of alienated planning, ecologically-unsustainable housing, and the deep social exclusions which emerge from market-based corporate-led housing. We contend that placed-based grassroots housing co-operatives form a particularly productive laboratory through which a housing commons can emerge that can develop new ways of living; and that integrate shelter, work, finance, food and energy as part of a grassroots-led social and solidarity economy. Examples abound of community-led place making which challenge the uncommon, corporate city and show glimpses of the urban common beyond the status quo.

Novel forms of eco and community-led housing, attempts to revive local places, neighbourhoods and high streets, as well as reclaim land, all demonstrate a bank of skills and knowledge that is being unleashed to build the common city. For example, Zurich in Switzerland has a strong cooperative housing culture but low construction rates which meant prices remain unaffordable for many. A 2011 referendum to increase non-profit housing allowed the 'More Than Housing' project to access a four- hectare plot of waste ground in the Hunziker Areal area of the city through which a consortium of more than 30 cooperatives formed a test-bed for Zurich's 2,000-Watt Society model. Design features support low energy, heating and car use to reduce carbon emissions. Rents are set at 20 to 30 percent below market levels, with subsidised rent for the 20 percent of households who have below-poverty level incomes. As one of Europe's largest-scale cooperatives, ongoing evaluations aim to identify transferable practices for other similar projects.

Further, a movement has emerged around what is called cohousing. The 'co' can refer to collaborative, collective or community-led housing, where the focus is on sharing and communality rather than private and individual living. Over the last few decades cohousing communities have emerged in many different national contexts, which all share an aim to build gregarious and intentional communities that maximise interaction and mutual association between neighbours. There are hundreds of cohousing projects in Denmark which is commonly understood as the birthplace of the cohousing movement in the 1960s, around 300 in the Netherlands, and over 100 in North America. According to the UK Cohousing Network, in 2013 there were 16 cohousing communities in the UK, with 45 in development.

In Northern Ireland, The Holding Project (THP) seeks to build 20 compact, eco-friendly micro-homes in Belfast for young people. Similarly, in suburban Amsterdam, a project called Startbok Riekerhaven responds to the city's crippling housing crisis by creating homes for young people aged between 18 and 28 who earn less than £30,000 a year. Homes are made from reconditioned wood and now houses nearly six hundred people. In Sheffield in the UK, innovator Jon Johnson set up Reach Homes to shake up the housing market using shipping containers combined with other reclaimed and recycled materials. In the south-west of England in Bristol's over-heated housing market, We Can Make is a live research and development programme which includes local people, architects, artists, policy-makers, academics and industry professionals involved in developing ways in which citizens can have a greater role in making new homes.

Self-building has also become a new watchword to tame the power of corporate volume house builders. Self-builders have been part of the largely invisible housing revolution for decades. In the global south, most dwellings in informal settlements are built by new arrivals. In Mexico City, one estimate suggests that 60 percent of housing is provided in that way. In Europe, backed up by locally based high skilled trades, many countries in Europe have very high levels of self-built homes. In Austria 80 percent of homes are self-built, while in Germany, France and Italy the figure is 60 percent, and in the USA and Australia it is over 40 percent. In the UK activists have combined self-build with Community Land Trusts to actively fight urban blight and take land out of the realm of speculation (Thompson, 2015).

Key to unlocking this community housing common is better information, especially in terms of who owns land. In the UK, Demodev is working with the Land Registry and national mapping agency Ordnance Survey in collaboration with Birmingham City Council to unlock underused land and turn it into open designed, sustainable, adaptable homes. DemoDev draws on the WikiHouse approach, an open source project to reinvent the way homes are made. WikiHouse is being developed by architects, designers, engineers, inventors, manufacturers and builders, collaborating to develop simple, sustainable, high-performance building technologies, which anyone can use and improve.

Of course, given the power and entrenchment of the neoliberal housing model, more direct interventions as well as citizen direct action will be needed to unlock the potential of the urban commons. In Barcelona, for example, the Platform For Mortgage Victims (PAH) championed the rights of those not able to pay their mortgages or who were facing eviction. PAH was so successful that it created a new citizens' movement, Barcelona en Comú. Meanwhile, the London Renters Union was set up in 2017 in the face of the chronic shortage of affordable homes in the UK capital and in the USA, the Right To The City Alliance emerged in 2007 as a response to gentrification and a call to halt the displacement of low-income groups, people of colour and marginalized communities. In the global south there are more dramatic flashpoints of struggles to defend and reclaim the urban commons. In South Africa where 10 percent of people live in shack developments, Abahlali baseMjondolo (The Shack Dwellers Movement), has been taking action and campaigning against evictions and for public housing. And in Brazil, the Movimento Dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto (The Homeless Workers Movement) has been taking direct action over the last two decades to confront the drastic inequalities in land ownership, most successfully by squatting abandoned land and buildings in Brazilian cities.

In sum, what we argue for is a civic housing commons which actively builds capacity within the social and solidarity economy by integrating shelter, food, energy and transport beyond the business-as-usual of corporate led place-making which can reinforce the value of antagonistic civic practices that can both respond to climate breakdown and attend to deep social and geographical injustices. The challenge is to keep these antagonistic practices fresh and relevant, especially since many alternative forms of housing provision, such as co-operatives, can grow to a significant size and become part of the mainstream housing market. In this, context we need to ensure co-operative and cohousing continue to build a broader movement against the further commodification and privatisation of housing, rather than being incorporated into them.

The challenge remains to continue to build 'institutional thickness' at the civic level through commonly-held assets that can radically prefigure concrete utopias that respond to the multiple crises of our age. In particular, this new civic layer provides a particularly essential function around deepening and embedding new forms of social relationships, based on an antagonism to neoliberalisation, as well as a deep ethic of care, equality, and participation. This can significantly

support the ambition of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal 11 around sustainable communities and the goal of making safe, resilient and affordable housing. There are also a range of exciting co-benefits from community-led housing that can support other SDGs, especially around health and well being, responsible consumption and climate action.

(ii) Labour: Socially useful production and useful work

In this section, we explore one example of how people seemingly excluded from socially useful work have 'taken it back' and made themselves visible and inspire new forms of resistance that include experiments in the organization and representation of unorganized and unrepresented workers, in this case one of the sectors of the Argentinian Unemployed Workers Organizations (UWOs, Dinerstein, 2010, see also Atzeni and Ghigliani, 2007). With this example we aim to emphasise the importance of what these experiments might bring, such as economic democracy and self-management, as intrinsically superior to any pre-manufactured solution to the problems of, say, unemployment. This is what we call 'prefigurative translation'.

Originating in the late 1990s, the Argentinean Unemployed Workers Organisations became well-known for their struggle for social justice, autonomy and dignity against social exclusion and unemployment. Organizationally spontaneous roadblock protests called for 'job creation, public works, essential services [and] participation in the management of employment programmes' (Dinerstein, 2010, p. 358; Dinerstein & Pitts, 2018). The 'Piqueteros' had a strategy of leveraging state resources through a combination of protest and social projects in the community and not only challenged the common view of the unemployed as excluded and redundant but also influenced the institutional framework within which social demands could be made. They did so through the creation of new UWOs which, through resistance and struggle, were successful ensuring that state unemployment benefits that would have been paid individually to then atomized unemployed workers were paid them collectively to the UWO, which would then facilitate collective discussions about what community projects were needed address the needs of social reproduction. In this case, the direct dependence on the benevolence of the state is mediated through new collective institutions, and the concept of continuing class struggle in an antagonistic manner is kept intact. While they are always at risk of being integrated into the modus operandi and dynamics imposed by the powers that they confront, and therefore suffer de-radicalization, the 'translation' of these concrete utopias into state policy is a process of struggle that allows room for, rather than forecloses, radical changes (Dinerstein, 2015).

One in particular is worthy of specific scrutiny: the *Union Trabajadores Desocupados* (UTD), or Unemployed Workers Union, a group of autonomous *Piqueteros* which was formed following the privatization of the local state oil company in the municipality of General Mosconi in the 1990s. The UTD was led by ex-oil workers who assessed projects for support according to 'local need', 'dignity' and 'genuine work' in 'solidarity'. Projects addressed 'long-term sustainability' in housing, education and environmental protection, and also everyday issues like recycling, refurbishing public buildings and houses, community farms, soup kitchen … retirement homes, health care visits to the ill and disabled, production of regional crafts, carpentry, and maintaining and repairing hospital emergency rooms and schools. In this way, the UTD became the 'quasi-city council' of General Mosconi (Dinerstein, 2010, p. 361).

Rather than a welfare policy granted from up on high to which individual recipients must address themselves, the UWOs instituted 'welfare policy from below' (Dinerstein, 2010, p. 361). Benefits of £30 per head per month were paid every 6 months from the state, and then distributed by the

UTD among the 'unemployed workers' who were 'willing to undertake community work'. By 2005 the UTD managed as many programs as the municipality and more than the provincial governments- housing co-ops, garment factory, training centers, a university. It also served as a job agency and trade union, using its leverage to get unemployed workers jobs, backed up by 'access blockades' outside and, once enough UTDs employed, 'line stoppages' within (Dinerstein, 2010, pp. 360-1).

Thus, the UWO was to some extent funded by the state, but not in a direct way reliant on the benevolence of the state, or as a way to tame 'unruly' *Piquetero* bodies through clientelistic practices. Rather resources were captured in an active and open relationship of conflict and negotiation that created space for things to exceed the capacity of the state to control and govern how the money was spent. The UWOs fought for 'the re-appropriation of social programmes for collective purposes', and they did this by switching between two modes of activity: mobilization, which used the roadblocks to demand resources; and policy, which moved state resources through the neighbourhood to provide funding for collective social projects. Their 'concrete utopia', insofar as it was achieved, was subject to and thrived from these contradictions, using "resistance as a conduit for community development and community development as a conduit for resistance" (Dinerstein, 2010, p. 361).

As such welfare was locked into a convincing reconstitution of a community of work and workers. The UTD, for example, identified "work as a true human attribute that must be used for the production of useful goods and services" (Dinerstein, 2010, p. 361). The key issue here was 'dignity'. By working within the contradictions that confront the everyday practice of work and the abstract determination of labor in capitalist society, the UWOs "challenged the individualistic logic of workfare and state policy and reconceptualized 'work' in capitalist society" (Dinerstein, 2017), whilst also embedding this in an attempt to overhaul the socially reproductive social relations of subsistence that compel us to work in the first place. For Zechner and Hansen (2015), "struggles around social reproduction allow for a renegotiation of the around what is considered work, or what is valued as such". We can see in the *Piqueteros*' struggle over *social reproduction* (Mason-Deese, 2016) a similar renegotiation, situating the separation from the means of subsistence and the compulsion to sell one's labor power in historical context. Theoretically, this destabilizes it. Practically, it allows the concrete search for contemporary on-the-ground alternatives – as long as the state is unwilling or unable to intervene, as it did with the Argentine barter networks or *Trueque,* discussed in the next section.

(iii) Alternative Money

Recent years has seen a mushrooming of alternative, complementary and community currencies generated from below. Advocates of alternative currencies argue that needs should be met and vibrant, convivial lifestyles created irrespective of the prior existence of not of the money to pay for it. Thus their politics is antagonistic to conceptions of neoliberalism that require financial stability to be front and centre, irrespective of the lives destroyed by the resulting austerity (North 2007). They provide inspiring alternatives to 'money-as-usual' that enable people to live ethically, sustainably, prosperously, and with dignity and justice in the Anthropocene (North, 2007). As such, and as constituent parts of the SSE, they make variable contributions to the SDGs.

LETS or Local Exchange Trading Schemes emerged in the late 1980s as grassroots, autonomous networks through which members exchanged goods and services with each other, paying for them

with a virtual local currency called a *green dollar* (in Canada, Australia and New Zealand), *talente* (in Germany, Hungary), or *grains of salt* (France). UK LETS adopted an amusing or locally significant name, for example 'tales' in Canterbury, 'brights' in Brighton, 'bobbins' in Manchester (North, 2006).   Network members did not have to have to have earned or been given credits in order to trade: rather they made a commitment to pay back what they spend later. Some LETS and Green Dollar networks now have some 25 years' trading experience under their belt. People joined these networks to meet new people, build community and obtain things they could not afford, but also to explore new economic values, ways of caring for each other, and living in a sustainable way. The state was not involved at all – this was autonomous, grassroots money.

Time banks connect people who exchange services rewarded with credits denominated in time, with no relationship to national money. Ithaca 'Hours', emerged in the late 1980s as the first of a wave of a paper currencies denominated in hours and decorated with local images and slogans extolling the virtues of a place (Maurer, 2003). They support feminist analyses that want to properly recognise, value and reward work often attributed to and carried out by women (Waring, 1990) rather than that highly rewarded by neoliberal markets. Consequently, time-based money appeals to those who want to develop alternatives to patriarchal capitalist calculations that value, for example, the work of lawyers above that of cleaners.

These grassroots alternative currency networks worked well enough when people exchanged services or things they had or produced at home or in a community garden, or where activists wanted to experiment with alternative practices in prefigurative ways in a concrete local money utopia. But 'alternative' LETS and green dollars were generally not seen as 'real money', and not accepted by mainstream businesses – so what could be bought was limited. The absence of any national currency referent in time-based money led to confusion in pricing goods: how many hours for a slice of pizza? How do you give out change (Maurer, 2003)? Paper money goes in and out of tills with ease. The result was that the many LETS, green dollar and timebank networks remained small, homogenous alternative concrete utopias, but the range of goods and services they covered was limited. Members in high demand struggled to spend as much as they earned, and often left. Should, many ask, these networks attempt to go a larger, perhaps citywide or regional scale, so more businesses participated and the range of goods and services improved?

In one place alternative currencies *did* scale up from the bottom – again in Argentina. The acute financial crisis of 2001 that had moved the Piqueteros into the mainstream and inspired a mass wave of factory occupations also gave birth to mass use of alternative, grassroots currencies called *Créditos* that were issued by barter or *Trueque* networks that spread across the country. For some time, Argentines helped each other through a catastrophic economic crisis through mutual aid although over issuance meant that in time *Créditos* catastrophically lost value in an inflationary cycle as too many notes chased too few trading opportunities (Gómez, 2008). When attached by the state for this, the networks collapsed in acrimony amid accusations that the whole thing had been a scam. This suggests that scaling up in uncontrolled, effervescent ways under conditions of social strain can lead to disaster

Outside the particular conditions of crisis-hit Argentina, some argued that the currencies needed to be scaled up so more goods and services could be accesses and more people could use them, which for others meant taming their potential. The proposed solution was designing high quality paper currencies (or scrip) that look and feel like conventional money, aligning them with state-backed money, and backing each note issued with conventional money held on deposit with a local bank. Businesses that could not spend all they earned could change it back into state currency, as each local note was backed. The assumption was that businesses would be more likely to accept local paper money that looked and felt more like money, more people would use

them, and the networks would grow. In the 1990s, the EF Schumacher Society created BerkShares, a local currency for the Berkshires, Massachusetts, aligned with the US dollar. In time, Ithaca Hours and BerkShares inspired the UK's transition currencies, local notes developed by Transition Towns that develop grassroots, localised responses to dangerous climate change. Lewes, Brixton, Bristol and (more briefly) Stroud and Exeter followed (North 2010: 161-172).

Bristol apart, however, there have been concerns that towns and their economic hinterlands are still too small to work well as scaled up 'optimal currency areas' (Mundell, 1961) in which the geographical spaces that money circulates in maps on to the circulation of physical goods and services in the economy. In Germany, *chiemgauer* regional money (*regiogeld*) circulates in an area 100km around a lake, the *Chiemsee,* which is seen as an area small enough to have some coherence, regional identity and be considered 'local'; but big enough to include a wide enough variety of businesses such that users can spend *chiemgauer* in some volume for day-to-day purchases. If enough businesses participated, business-to-business exchange would be catalysed, and in time, local production stimulated (North and Weber, 2013). By June 2018 629000 *cheimgauer* circulated.

These paper currencies did scale up to some extent, thus deepening the network: but they then encountered four new problems. First, aligning the local currency directly to national currency was seen by more radical members as replicating the inequalities of the capitalist economy (North 2006). They failed to extend the *noncapitalist* part of not uniformly capitalist market economies, that based on sharing and reciprocity. Secondly, the local currency can only be obtained in exchange for national currency rather than emitted on the basis of a personal promise to repay in the future (as is the case with LETS and time banks). The question then arises: why would anyone change universal money accepted everywhere into a more limited form of money, unless they had a political or affective commitment to the project, or their place, or to supporting their local economy? Third, those who spend all their money on essential purchases not available for local money are excluded: this is not 'new' money.

Another form of scaling up with perhaps unhappy tendencies is the rise of cryptocurrencies that store and lock together chains (blockchains) of electronic bookkeeping entries to log and validate transactions, without using banks. The libertarian supporters of these cryptocurrencies argue that they are an exhilarating, disruptive and potentially liberating financial innovation that provide a decentralised, non-state alternative to capitalist banks that could be a solution to poverty, financial crisis, debt and hyperinflation (Dierksmeier and Seele, 2016). Yanis Varoufakis developed early proposals for a blockchain drachma should Greece leave the Eurozone (North, 2016), while Maduro's Venezuela developed the Petro to avoid US sanctions. The widespread use of contactless electronic payment and mobile phones, and a concomitant fall in the use of cash, has led to the development of local electronic currencies, but it is hard to see how these remain part of the SSE so much as means of facilitating exchange of goods and services produced in entirely conventional ways, perhaps with some attachment to 'the local'. Thus the experience of alternative currencies can show both the benefits of *not* scaling up as thereby the radical benefits of alternative currencies are lost, but being happy to work in prefigurative but concrete utopias. In their small scale and subsequent decline, we also see the limits of the purely prefigurative (although see North 2007:126-148 for a counterfactual example).

Conclusion

The discussion above suggests that the key issue at stake is the extent to which grassroots SSE actors are able to *deepen* their contribution to the creation of flourishing livelihoods given the resources they have, rather than scale up if that will blunt their potential and radical edge. Reformist and business-as-usual strategies for sustainable social inclusion are well represented by the SDGs, and can speak for themselves. We argue that there is an imperative to listen better to grassroots actors with new approaches and critical perspectives and, walking with them asking questions, understand how we can work better together rather than asking how they can be utilised to meet elite conceptions of how the world should be. The search for prefigurative translation therefore suggests that more attention needs to be paid into how the potential of the SSE sector can be blocked or 'mistranslated' by academics, policymakers and governmental actors, as well as practitioners themselves. Grassroots SSE actors are acutely aware of how their potential is translated and co-opted into activity that reproduces current power relations. They often have a sophisticated understanding of how they can 'play the game' to maximise influence and gain resources, alongside staying true to more radical objectives.

The translation of radical social practices into programmes of governance can sometimes serve to foreshorten the development of alternatives by reducing dynamism to stasis, fixing in place otherwise open relations of creation and contestation. This is what we mean by 'mistranslation'. It is something seen specifically in instances where elite actors laying claim to social movements seek or achieve power and sap the latter of their ideas and energy, thereby weakening and not furthering the search for alternatives. More generally, the risk of 'top-down' translation comes when policymakers, purporting to pose solutions to intractable problems, seek closure and resolution to social antagonisms and contradictions, rather than keeping open their radical possibilities. We see 'translation' as a contested process. The examples presented above suggest that a different form of translation, i.e. 'prefigurative translation' (Dinerstein 2017) is required, with which openness might be maintained through the generation and reproduction of new mediations of these antagonisms and contradictions that work within the existing state of things to incubate alternatives. The practices covered in this paper demonstrate the potential for policy to translate existing grassroots projects into coherent responses to the key challenges of our time by refusing to promise that problems can be solved wholesale and that the world can be absolved of contradiction. Instead they work in, through and against the monetary mediation of human social relations under capitalism to keep open the possibility that it is then feasible and desirable to move *beyond* the forms of mediation on which exploitation and domination rest, and in which they are expressed, in capitalist society. In gesturing towards this excess - the 'beyond zone' (Dinerstein 2017) – the translation we propose is *prefigurative*.

This perspective implies that, in pursuit of such a prefigurative translation, there lies no attraction in scalability if it simply means scaling up the contribution of the SSE to neoliberalism. A more nuanced understanding of what scaling and replication means is necessary, attuned to place and to local power relations without assuming that 'bigger is better'. We argue that this needs to be undertaken from the bottom up by 'thinking and acting like a Zapatista wherever you are' (Chatterton, 2017). From this perspective, people change their worlds together, and support from above must be granted in such a way as to create 'civic thickness' through novel meso-level institutions that play a dual role, nurturing and feeding resources to microlevel experimentation at the grassroots whilst mobilising appropriate resources from sympathetic elements of the macro state level, with the ultimate aim of creating a new vision for a more participatory, people centred state. This civic thickness widens rather than closes off the space for coproduction and democratic participation. This would help develop a *deeper* meso-level SSE sector rather than just a 'scaled

up' sector contributing to the reproduction of neoliberal capitalism. It would, we suggest, create real alternatives to wage labour and capitalism rather than simply supporting those the capitalist state has abandoned and integrating those excluded into capitalist work and monetised social reproduction.

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