



**VJERAN KATUNARIĆ**

**A SOCIOLOGICAL  
EXAMINATION  
OF THE  
GIFT  
ECONOMY**

**ENVISIONING THE FUTURE**

# **A Sociological Examination of the Gift Economy**

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# **A Sociological Examination of the Gift Economy: Envisioning the Future**

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*Dedicated to the memory of my mother, truly a gift-giver*

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# Acknowledgments

Before writing this book, I touched many times on the topic of the gift economy, but only briefly. The most extensive and most interesting part for a large audience was the focus of my honorary lecture entitled “Toward a post-monetary economy” delivered before the Croatian Sociological Society on the occasion of the “Rudi Supek” award, which was granted to me for outstanding achievements in sociology. Some reactions from the audience, which did not consist solely of sociologists, expressed an expected mix of intrinsic curiosity and amazement. For example, a sociologist interested in ecological alternatives expressed an opinion shared by some alternative communities, which is that the withdrawal of money would not be a good solution because it disturbs an important process in the circulation of matter, that is, our shared bloodlines. Another colleague in educational sciences expressed his skepticism toward my idea that future shops would operate without cashiers and that everybody would be free to take whatever is needed. I responded by asking if he, that colleague, had taken ten kilos of bread or one kilo of bread, that is, as much as he needed for that day. He retorted, surely one kilo and no more. I responded: “You see, then, that such an idea is not utopian and is possible to be applied at least in one case; and probably there are many more cases like that.” Of course, I would not describe this proposed idea as realistic in the sense that most people would choose to do the same, that is, to share instead of grabbing for all of the food that they can when given such a rare opportunity.

Now, fast forward to instances of more serious discussion about the ideas and practices of the gift economy that I had with other people in my academic and professional surroundings and for which I am sincerely grateful. First among equals is Katy Mathers, a sociologist at Emerald, who showed an exemplary understanding of what I submitted as a proposal for the book. Very soon a positive anonymous review ensued, with some interesting questions as to how I intended to make an original contribution to a topic which has been covered so many times before. I was immediately ready to take up the challenge.

Soon thereafter the editorial team at Emerald was formed, headed by Brindha Thirunavukkarasu, who regularly followed the development of my manuscript.

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dedicated to the former Yugoslav self-managing economy, especially its variety called the “agreement economy”; many thanks, indeed!).

For Alexandra Ålund and Carl Ulrik Schierup of the Swedish sociological community, my manuscript was another occasion to prolong our old debates about how to evaluate the ex-Yugoslav political economy in the context of the history of advanced social movements striving for social and economic justice and for transcending traditional social and ethnic boundaries.

Last, but not least – quite on the contrary – are two persons for whom the German proverb “Der Zucker kommt zuletzt” (“The sugar comes at the end”) is singularly appropriate. One is John Jacobs, my proverbial and unmatched editor and proofreader, who sometimes understands better what I meant than I do. The other person is Blanka Katunarić, who understands virtually everything, a non-sociologist who explained why sociologists are so unpopular among other professions and broader audiences. It is because, as she says, we are the bearers of bad news rather than good news about the outlook of contemporary society. I hope that in this book I have succeeded in moving on a little bit from a such predicament or at least in reducing the magnitude of the bad news as well as in trying out some good news as regards our common future on this planet. The prospect of a global shaping of the gift economy is one such piece of good news.