

# **Sovereignty, Contestation and 'the Economy'**

International Conference, April 25-26, 2017

Research Group Sovereignty and Social Contestation,

Department of Cultural Anthropology, Utrecht University

## **Rationale of the conference**

This conference examines the diverse articulation of economic sovereignty beyond and within state boundaries. Increasing global flows of capital and the financialization of all aspects of society invite discussions on the ways in which certain economic forms appear as hegemonic and how this supremacy is (re)produced as a daily reality in the realm of finance (Holmes 2013; Ouroussoff 2010) as much as in the realm of production and consumption (Kasmir and Carbonella 2014). The conference builds upon an anthropological understanding of sovereignty and social contestation, focusing on the constitution of social and economic order and the authority to decide on inclusion and exclusion from communities (Oosterbaan and Pansters 2015). As many governments claim that they cannot or should not fulfil the promise of sustainable livelihoods to their citizens, transnational institutions and corporations appear to gain increasing leverage over these domains. At the same time, economic practices in finance, production and consumption become subject to social contestation on local and translocal scales through sharing economy initiatives, community currencies, faith-based ethical consumption, and solidarity economy networks (Grasseni 2013; Knight 2015). This conference will map some of these shifting economic landscapes by inquiring about sovereignty, value, sustainability, and livelihoods and how these are construed in contested ways on an everyday basis.

Anthropology has been at the forefront of the critique of neoclassical approaches to the economy. It also has a rich recent record of scrutinizing the neoliberalization of contemporary capitalist societies. Economic anthropology has revitalized its Polanyian inspiration and has consistently emphasized how economic action is always embedded within a broader socio-cultural and historical context (Hann and Hart 2011). Within this frame, recent avenues illuminate how, for instance, the contours of the economy are in fact continuously regulated, shaped, and monitored by policy (Roitman 2005). Moreover, anthropological political economy has expanded and updated its Marxian inspiration around class and exploitation, and has extended its field from peasants to labour and to contemporary capitalist transformations in a context of financialised globalisation (Carrier and Kalb 2015; Kasmir and Carbonella 2014). Indeed, a fruitful example of this is the emergence of an anthropology of finance (Ho 2009; Ouroussoff 2010; Zaloom 2006), which includes an attentiveness to how institutions such as central banks actively construct the economy through the formulation and communication of monetary policy in an 'economy of words' (Holmes 2013). It is no exaggeration to say that the theoretical spaces in between Marx, Proudhon, Kropotkin, Mauss, Keynes and Polanyi have become an intensely traversed field.

## **Call for papers**

We invite papers that combine insights from economic anthropology with critical perspectives from ethnography and political-economic approaches, providing original routes to examining the practices, representations and discourses of economic sovereignty as they are construed

at diverse sites, where policies are met with subversion, appropriation, contestation, affirmation, and compliance.

Submissions of paper proposals are invited for the four plenary panels outlined below. Each panel will be composed of 4 to 5 presentations, followed by discussion at the end. Each speaker will have a maximum of 25 minutes to present and each session will be wrapped up by a discussant.

Submissions should be sent to [C.L.Kanters@uu.nl](mailto:C.L.Kanters@uu.nl) no later than September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016. Please include a paper title, an abstract of 250-300 words, a short biography of 100-150 words as well as a clear indication as to which panel you would like to contribute to. Limited financial support will be available to cover accommodation costs for all accepted speakers. We therefore invite interested speakers to explore their own funding opportunities, especially for travel costs.

Conference proceedings will be developed towards publication as special issues or as an edited volume and we expect a firm commitment from all speakers to submit first drafts of their articles to be circulated by January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017.

The panels will focus on the complementary aspects of economic sovereignty and social contestation, the dynamics of (re)producing economic hegemony and the societal challenges to this. We welcome contributions that touch on the following four themes:

**1. Financialization** (Convenor: Don Kalb, Discussant: Doug Holmes)

Financialization is the process in which ever larger parts of social reproduction and everyday life become captured by financial circuits and their accumulation imperatives. We are inviting papers that look at this transnational process and its repercussions for social reproduction in national, urban, and household contexts. Indebtedness, infrastructure finance, the transformation of social housing, the management and regulation of money, the emergence of local and alternative currencies, etc. are issues that we want to discuss.

**2. Old and New Global Divisions of Labour** (Convenor: Patrick Neveling, Discussant: Chris Hann)

The production and circulation of goods and commodities is a highly contested dimension of the global economy. Due to the restructuring of global trading regulations in the World Trade Organisation and a series of "crises" beginning in Asia in the late 1990s, the positioning of a given local or national economy within changing global divisions of labour remains volatile. While competition states, currency fluctuations, and sovereign debt crises continue to encourage the relocation of manufacturing and services, workers and the disenfranchised in industry, agriculture and beyond are forging new alliances. This section asks for contributions that chart and analyze the development of such alliances, their economic activities, and their ambitions to reconfigure economic sovereignties, markets, and the nature of work in the face of changing global production networks and global commodity chains.

**3. Sharing economies & the commons** (Convenor: Cristina Grasseni, Discussant: Tine de Moor)

Platforms enabling the sharing of resources are experiencing a steady growth. Similarly, we witness an expansion of decentralised economic projects concerned with issues of collective ownership and the distribution of resources. We welcome papers that address shifts in people's value regimes, strategies to reclaim the commons, and how new patterns of economic exchange configure new civic ties and identities. But also how such apparently novel economic forms interact with existing political-economic structures and may (re)produce similar forms of inclusion, exclusion and

authority.

**4. Sustainable livelihoods** (Convenors: Coco Kanters and Vinzenz Bäumer Escobar, Discussant: Susana Narotzky)

Claims for economic sovereignty include the various ways in which the prevailing economic paradigm of neoliberal capitalism is being challenged and reworked by movements prioritising social solidarity, local economic development and environmental sustainability. In the wake of the 2008 financial crisis and the current, new expectations of recession, many European communities continue to struggle as austerity measures and the retreating welfare state radically altered their livelihood strategies (Narotzky and Besnier 2014). As people craft new means of making ends meet, local economies emerge that are directed at socio-economic sustainability by emphasizing trust and reciprocity. We invite papers focusing on what it means to organise sustainable alternative livelihoods.

**Conference Organizing Committee:** Cristina Grasseni; Don Kalb; Coco Kanters; Patrick Neveling; Vinzenz Bäumer Escobar; Kees Koonings ([SOSCO program](#) coordinator)

## Works Cited

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