

TITLE OF THE PROJECT: Alternative economic spaces and practices for resilience building in Spanish cities

ACRONYM: PRESECAL

KEY WORDS: alternative economic practices, resilience, geographical proximity, networks, cities, economic downturn

SUMMARY

This research proposal is focused on the identification and analysis of the new forms of economic coordination that have flourished in Spanish cities during the current socio-economic crisis, when austerity policies have been pervasive. Among the bewildering array of economic activities labelled as 'sharing economy', 'solidarity economy', 'alternative economy', or 'social economy', this research project will choose the ones that meet the following criteria. First, they are arranged in flat cooperative networks built up by individuals, firms or social organizations in order to exchange goods, services, and information. Second, they explicitly address solidarity and social-spatial justice goals through intentional transformative actions. Third, these actions are framed by a larger innovation strategy that mobilizes local actors and resources to design new answers current problems and challenges. And fourth, this strategy pretends to build -on the medium to long term- alternatives to the current economic system or, at least, to its present fashion of global and financial capitalism.

According to these selection criteria, the practices and activities targeted by this research proposal may fall into the following categories: goods or services production (workers' cooperatives, craft networks, urban community gardens, co-working spaces), exchange and distribution (time banks, seeds banks, barter networks, farmers' or producers' markets, second-hand markets), consumption (organic consumer groups and networks, shared kitchens, P2P education, free open universities), or finance (local exchange trade systems, credit cooperatives)

This research proposal explicitly develops a geographical approach, so it will only address those alternative economic practices promoted by actors that share organizative, cultural, and geographical proximity. The actors often struggle to shape a true place, that is, a space which is shared by a community that acknowledges its suitability for conviviality. Urban areas, and their ongoing spatial, social, and economic transformations, will be the field test for the project. Namely, the usual concentration of these practices in particular urban hotspots (districts, neighbourhoods, let alone streets) will be carefully analysed because it strengthens the local social capital and may foster new local micro-dynamics for a more inclusive urban resilience. This micro-spatial approach will check the alleged capability of these alternative economic practices to build a small-scale economy based on peer-to-peer exchanges that contribute to interpersonal solidarity and reciprocity. This research project will be deployed in a range of cities that is representative of the larger Spanish urban system: Madrid, Sevilla, Zaragoza, Alicante, Valladolid, Salamanca and León. Fieldwork in these locations (semi-structured interviews, participant observation, focus groups) will be the methodological tool for highlighting the relationship between city size, socio-institutional contexts and the variety and density of alternative economic practices.