

European Science Foundation

ESF Exploratory Workshop

TITLE: Reciprocity as a Human Resource

Barcelona 12-15 September 2001

Scientific Report¹

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ORGANISATION

Although the timing of the workshop was not very felicitous everybody that had been invited attended, with the exception of Josepa Cucó (Universitat de València) who couldn't attend. The room where the sessions took place "Sala Ramón y Cajal" in the old building of the Universitat de Barcelona was a perfect environment fostering debate for it sits 30 people around an oval table. Accommodations at the Hotel Regencia Colón, near the Cathedral, and food arrangements were also appropriate, and guests felt welcomed.

The program of the workshop developed as it had been planned with an opening debate session under the title "is reciprocity an enlightening concept to address contemporary issues?" where the speakers were Ignasi Terradas (University of Barcelona), Enzo Mingione (University of Milano-Bicocca), Gadi Algazi (University of Tel Aviv). The following sessions were organized around specific themes: Session 1, "Reciprocity and Public Policy" with participants Anna Bull and Susan Milner (University of Bath), José Luis Molina and Alba Alayo (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona), Alexis Ferrand (Université de Lille). Session 2, "Reciprocity, Justice and Injustice" with participants Giovanni Levi (Università Ca'Foscari da Venezia), Paz Moreno (Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia), Cristina Larrea (Universitat de Barcelona). Session 3, "Reciprocity and Globalization" with participants Ubaldo Martínez-Veiga (Universidad Autónoma Madrid), Silvia Bofill (Universitat de Barcelona), Larissa Lomnitz (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico). Session 4, "Reciprocity and Economic Competitiveness" with participants Dina Vaiou (National Technical University Athens), Costis Hadjimichalis (Horokopio University), Ayse Bugra (Boaziçi University Istanbul), Susana Narotzky (Universitat de Barcelona) and Gavin Smith (University of Toronto). A concluding debate "Reciprocity vs. Social Capital: Issues of Methodology, Policy and Politics" and "Common Interests and Future Collaboration: an Agenda for a European Network?" provided assessment of the results of the workshop, as well as the positive decision to further pursue our collaboration in the form of a European Network around the empirical, theoretical and policy related significance of reciprocity relationships.

¹ This report was written by Dr. Susana Narotzky (Universitat de Barcelona)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Scientific Context of the Workshop

Reciprocity is a concept almost as vague and undefined as the related one of social capital. It has a particular history in the social sciences that derives, originally, from Enlightenment views of the social and political community as a pact between individuals. And has been somewhat elaborated by anthropologists seeking to explain patterns of resource circulation in non-capitalist societies (or pre-modern in Weberian terms). It is also the concept that substantiates the quality of social relationships that build up into "social capital". That is: something *other than* market imperatives is the base for the pattern, intensity and hierarchies of the social relations that obtain in a particular space. Something part of a *common culture* and something deemed a *moral duty* within the values of the culture sets the pattern for action, and because of this, relationships are recurrent and endure beyond concrete exchange actions. Trust and motivation for economic action seem to rest on long term, ongoing social relations based on emotional links that would be the "natural" constituents of large parcels of the social fabric (such as kinship or community). This substance of equitable long term social relations of exchange beyond market incentives is what is generally understood as reciprocity. Reciprocity as equitable, non-market exchange processes. Also, often, reciprocity as something that precedes capitalist economic relationships and is inherently "good".

But reality seems to be more messy and more historical. The affects and social proximity underlying reciprocal exchanges, voluntary and forced solidarities, are also the result of people's historical experience regarding different possibilities of making a living. This morality of affects underpinning reciprocity is thickly interwoven with the unfolding regional history of labor market imperatives and state regulatory practices, for example. Although it might be thought of as "natural" it is not natural. Neither is it "better" than capitalism or liberal politics: reciprocal relations are embedded in power differentials and allow exploitative practices (in its extreme versions, this has been addressed as the "downside" of social capital, or as "negative" reciprocity). However, practices that highlight subjective emotional reasons and moral imperatives to explain the structure of economic and political relations, are a different way of producing mutual obligation, and their articulation with other more "rational" and utility driven reasons has to be explained from within a historical, context dependent framework.

The anthropological concept of reciprocity describes and seeks to explain transfers that are embedded in domains structured by social and cultural relations where the reference to morality is crucial in the valuation both of the relationship that supports these transfers and of the one that emerges from them. In the realm of the economy, reciprocity refers to exchanges taking place within logics other than that of the market (i.e. gift, charity, solidarity, mutual help, etc.) and supported by previously existing social bonds. In the realm of politics, reciprocity refers to the production, reproduction and subversion of mutually dependent relations of power and obligation that are supported by conceptions of justice and injustice. Diverse modes of provisioning where transfers depend on different logics and contribute to reproduce distinct aspects or organizational structures of a society are simultaneously present in most social systems.

For anthropology, relations that are better explained by using the concept of reciprocity represent a major part of social action in human societies whether in the public or private domains, in domestic, educational, entrepreneurial or political functions. Other social scientists (i.e., social exchange theory) had underscored the usefulness of the concept as an analytical tool. More recently the need to take into account informal, socially embedded transfers of resources (including information) in the maintenance of the social fabric, especially in stress situations, has been strongly reassessed. Social scientists, however, have alerted to an excessive optimism regarding the nature of reciprocity as

invariably positive in its procedure and results. Indeed, because of the moral reference at the core of reciprocity relations, the highly contested and extreme relativity of moral domains are particularly subject to devolve into unjust, exploitative and speculative social processes such as patronage, corruption and mafias.

Many sustainable development models nowadays stress "social capital", "solidarity" and grassroots political and economic mobilization as human resources that should be taken into account. There is, however, a lack of definition of the concepts and a lack of detailed and comparative analyses of the actual social processes that are glossed under terms such as "social capital" or "community empowerment". Moreover, the analysis of actual, local, policies of development and social welfare designed on the basis of a "social capital" model under the pressure of such institutions as the World Bank have been strongly criticized as a mere varnish to locally implement neo-liberal economic policies. Critics have pointed to the negative effects of such policies in economic terms but also in political terms through the re-design of mutual obligations between citizens and the state, co-optation of alternative social movements or its leaders, an upsurge of clientelistic and patronage relations, privatization and regionalization of social responsibility, and a tendency to support corporatist models of political participation.

Reciprocity relationships as they occur in real life are complex and ambivalent social domains, full of tensions, manipulation, extreme power differentials, and injustice. As all social relations they are not univocally and universally beneficial; they have, however, a magnificent potential to enhance social welfare and local empowerment that should be encouraged. Paramount to our perspective is to approach reciprocity as a form of social interaction and discourse that appears *not as an alternative development of social cohesion and responsibilities* (such as it has been often presented by social scientists) but as *part of an articulated totality* with other forms of interaction and ways of access to resources and claims to rights. From this perspective the concept of reciprocity that we want to explore, attempts to capture the tension and ambivalence in the construction, legitimization and practice of mutual obligation and responsibility in economic and political terms. It seeks to approach social relations located simultaneously in market and non-market circuits of provisioning, in universal and particularistic modes of claiming, between beneficial and predatory outcomes of redistribution processes.

The ESF Exploratory Workshop

The ESF Exploratory workshop was organized in the attempt to value and assess the potential power of reciprocity as a reality and as a concept, to inform social welfare and development policies in Europe. In order to achieve this aim we strongly supported a multidisciplinary approach, although we were aware that discursive knowledge styles and theoretical traditions could hinder communication. Indeed, when thinking of reciprocity, social scientists speak of a variety of concepts that are meant to address the multiplex contents of social relationships that enable and sustain distribution and allocation of resources along culturally and morally sanctioned forms of everyday interdependencies and power differentials, outside the formalized realm of contract, market and the state. We were aware that different disciplines (sociologists, anthropologists, human geographers, historians, political scientists, economists) address similar empirical realities with distinct conceptual tools that shed light upon different issues of "informal" social relationships pervading the making of a livelihood for many people. The experience however proved to be methodologically empowering in analytical and theoretical terms.

Participants in the Workshop spanned a variety of disciplines and came from EU member countries (France, UK, Spain, Italy, Greece) and non-EU (Turkey) as well as from the Middle-East (Algazi) and the Americas (Canada and Mexico). The mean age of participants was 43, with local mean being slightly lower (38) due to the presence of three doctoral students.

As a result of the ESF Workshop participants agreed to integrate a European Network around the theme of "Reciprocity as a Human Resource". The aim of the proposed Network would be the longer-term co-ordination of European researchers working on issues that focus on growth, social equity and quality of life and are exploring the capabilities and dangers of other-than-market or state systems of effecting transfers and building social ties. The Network will compare the production and use of concepts in the context of concrete empirical objects and particular disciplinary traditions with the aim of achieving the following targets: 1) methodological normalization, 2) a common comparative framework and 3) an integrated protocol for research.

SCIENTIFIC CONTENT OF THE ESF WORKSHOP

The opening debate contributed to set the main issues from the start, and to highlight the different disciplinary approaches to reciprocity. An anthropologist (Terradas), a sociologist (Mingione) and a historian (Algazi), presented their views, trying first to define an elusive concept and second to capture its explicatory force. As a starting definition, reciprocity was presented as a series of social relations that sustain flows of transfers based on moralities of mutual obligation other than the contract. This initial definition presents a few basic ideas that form the substance of the concept: 1) durable social relations, 2) flows of transfers, 3) moral obligation and 4) contraposition to another form of obligation.

Terradas' presentation sought to ground the concept in the historical context of its initial development starting with Malinowski and Mauss in the 1920s. As a theoretical concept, reciprocity takes its foundations on the concept of "gift" developed by Mauss where morality and interest are woven together in three articulated and bounded obligations: give-receive-return. "The gift", as a concept, mediates between "total prestations" and the "contract" in the process of creating mutual obligations that enable flows of transfers to occur. However, this theoretical construct, that Terradas brands "strict reciprocity", is constantly put into question by empirical reality: all ethnographic examples available, past and present, overflow the original concept with its bounded and abstract universal intent: the reality of the social relations that are defined as reciprocity is more complex, that is, reciprocity is context dependent, there is "more than reciprocity". The "moral of reciprocity" as an abstract universal in the form that Mauss and those after him presented it for all human societies, is constantly put into question by the specificity of the particular context where concrete moral obligations develop historically. On the other hand, formally bounded and restricted obligations such as the contract will appear as "less than reciprocity", that is, as a space of relationship thoroughly and explicitly defined and self-contained where there is no space for implicit reference to any other form of moral obligation. However, Terradas pointed that even legal contracts often overflow implicitly into context dependent moral obligations.

Algazi in turn pointed to the fact that reciprocity is one of the key identity concepts of the West starting with the Enlightenment political philosophers of the social contract and up to the present. Indeed, the political community is built as a reciprocal exchange of obligations between individuals and between citizens and the State. Moreover, this image contrasts with other images of political order such as "oriental despotism" that would be founded on unilateral imposition of the will of the sovereign upon its subjects. That is, reciprocity is an essential part of the construction of (Western) "Civilization" and of the idea of the "best" form of political interdependence. In addition to this, the hegemony of the market system has introduced in the concept of reciprocity an idea of costs/benefits accounting among individuals involved in any sort of transference relationship. Thus

reciprocity gives easily way to social exchange theory. Paradoxically, this market saturated perspective generates counter-images of "pure" social relations devoid of the materiality and egoism of the market. Here, the gratuitous gift, and by extension reciprocity, emerge as the antithesis of market exchange and of contractual obligation. We should be cautious of both these historically grounded forces in our uses of the concept of reciprocity.

Algazi pointed to an additional issue: the relevance of indigenous notions of reciprocity in the actors' discourses in the processes of negotiating the production and reproduction of specific relations of domination. That is, actors use the discourse of reciprocity as a key strategy to give a meaningful form to social interdependency. However, often, the discourse of reciprocity is imposed by those individuals or groups that hold power in order to symbolically "balance" social relations that are strongly unequal and predatory.

Mingione pointed that reciprocity must be understood as a social relation where resources and obligations are brought together in the context of social organizations where members are in close personal contact with one another. Following Weberian models he highlighted the distinction between reciprocity relations and associative relations: whilst in the former case individual interest is subsumed within the common interest, in the latter case individual interest is the common objective of the association. However, within this basic distinction that refers to the social organization framework where social action becomes meaningful, Mingione pointed that instead of supporting the usual hypothesis that social development meant the abandonment of reciprocity relationships in favor of associative relationships in the realms of the economy and politics, recent research underscores the persistence and, in some cases, the increase of reciprocity relationships in "modernization" processes and in the core developed Western countries. But this implies significant transformations of these reciprocity relations that are found in the contemporary Western context. Very salient are voluntary (associative) social relationships but where the significant objective is the common good (reciprocity) instead of primarily individual interest, an example of this would be NGOs. Also, as automatic ascription into social organizations weakens in favor of acquired membership processes, more egalitarian and democratic forms of power seem to penetrate reciprocity relations. Therefore, proximity to decision-making centers gives more flexibility to reciprocity networks without totally subsuming individual interests within collective interest, as was the case in "traditional" social organizations. However the transformation of reciprocity systems from a "community" based order into an "associative" based order presents problems of cultural inconsistency with some of the foundational tenets of modern societies such as the universal rationalism of meritocracy ideology, as opposed to the legitimate particularism of reciprocity networks.

The introductory debate proposed a series of issues for further discussion and research: 1) the tension between universalist and particularist systems and discourses of social interdependence, 2) the tension between egalitarian models of justice and proportional models of justice, 3) the tension between the production of different (generally articulated) systems of social control in economic and political practice, and the production of concrete contexts of obligation and mutual responsibility (moral orders, cultural environments, etc.), often multiple and in conflict, often invisible and implicit.

The following sessions of the workshop provided empirical grounding to the theoretical debate on reciprocity. Although coming from different disciplines (sociology, geography, economics, anthropology and history) researchers had worked mainly with qualitative methods and had favored prolonged fieldwork in order to gather significant data on informal, non-market, morally sustained processes of resource transfers, and to observe long-term processes of construction of durable relations of mutual obligation and responsibility. Historians favored micro-history techniques of analyzing archival material in order to gather qualitative and extremely context sensitive information. The localization of fieldwork and data gathering included a variety of European and non-European sites: Turkey, Spain, Greece, Italy, France, United Kingdom, Germany, Chile, Russia, Brazil and

Mexico. The comparative dimension that emerged from the pooling of the participants' empirical data together with their grounding of analysis in diverse theoretical traditions enabled us to assess:

- 1) the pervasiveness in economic processes to recourse to non-contractual, non-market, extremely personalized social relations in the structuring of production and consumption: industrial districts in Spain (Narotzky and Smith) and Greece (Vaiou and Hadjimichalis), sustainable forestry management in Mexico (Bofill), economic development and state policies in Turkey (Buga), consumption in Chile and Russia (Adler-Lomnitz), food security for elder people in Spain (Contreras).
- 2) the pervasiveness of informal, personalized modes of claiming rights and social services, and of instituting long-term systems of mutual obligation and solidarity: clientelistic and familistic social policies in Turkey (Bugra), sanitation infrastructure policies in Brazilian *favelas* (Larrea), immigrant integration and elderly assistance provision in Spain (Molina and Alayo, Contreras), health care and information in France (Ferrand), urban regeneration policies in Italy, the UK, and France (Bull and Milner).
- 3) the tension between positive and negative effects of informal, personalized social relationships in the economic and political spheres, sometimes leading to extreme forms of exploitation and corruption: industrial districts (Narotzky and Smith, Vaiou and Hadjimichalis, Martinez-Veiga), an Islamic based moral economy and a paternalist state in Turkey (Bugra), trading votes against promises of sewage infrastructure in Brazil (Larrea), the historical case of Auschwitz economic and political everyday organization (Moreno), the historical case of medieval relations between peasants and lords in Germany (Algazi).

It was clear throughout, as well, that the anthropological concept of reciprocity was a) not homogeneously and consistently used by the exponents of different disciplinary traditions; b) not clearly differentiated from other concepts such as "social capital"; c) not clearly defined in its economic (flows of transfers), political (modes of participation in the common good), and cultural (the construction of mutual obligation and responsibility) aspects and, d) suffered from the frequent conflation of "emic" (indigenous) and "etic" (expert) discourses about the character and substance of social relationships.

A set of questions have emerged for the future: how do we approach those social relations that sustain flows of transfers but appear not to be directly linked to the market? Are all social relations part of a capitalist global structure of articulations and dependencies? In what way non-market, non-contractual relationships are essential in processes of inclusion/exclusion from public claims? How is the sense of mutual obligation produced and sustained between individuals, groups, institutions? How do we make sense of the often ambivalent valuation of transfers by anthropological subjects? We think that "reciprocity" can be a useful conceptual tool to explore these issues but it needs to be refined if it is to serve comparative purposes and produce further theoretical challenge.

As a result of the ESF Exploratory Workshop, participants agreed to pursue their collaboration in the form of a European Network on "Reciprocity as a Human Resource". This project wants to study reciprocity as a human resource with a great potential to solve many of the problems hindering European social, political and economic integration, but one that can also have downside effects. We want to assess the value of such practices and their economic, social and political accountability. Relationships not mediated by the market or by the state seem to have always been at the basis of the social fabric yet have been undervalued by policy makers. The end-objective of the Network and of a future Collaborative European project is to build up the necessary knowledge and synergies in order to support and inform policies needed to implement a sustainable and equitable development process in Europe.

Our **targets** as a Network would center around 3 issues that have to be dealt with urgently if there is to be any advancement and coordination in the domain of the understanding of social interaction and of informed welfare policies.

1. **methodological normalization** of the field of reciprocity processes that will enable comparison and systematization of work that is already being undertaken by groups of researchers in different European countries.
2. to co-ordinate the existing body of empirical material about reciprocity relations in Europe by creating a space of contact where researchers will be able to debate about similar theoretical issues in a **common comparative framework**.
3. to develop a basic **integrated protocol** of research addressing issues where reciprocity relationships are paramount by designing a set of fundamental questions that will enable future researchers to properly describe, define and categorize the processes and relationships observed when addressing informal, non-institutionalized social interaction in different domains.

Our aim is to create the knowledge corpus and methodology that will enable informed policy from institutions at the local, national and European level aiming to reduce economic, social and political deprivation.

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FINAL PROGRAM OF THE ESF WORKSHOP

**European Science Foundation
ESF SCSS EXPLORATORY WORKSHOP
“Reciprocity as a Human Resource”**

Sala Ramón y Cajal
Barcelona, Spain

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SCSS Topic C:

European Urban Space; Growth, Social Equity and Quality of Life.

PROGRAMME OF THE WORKSHOP

12- 15 September 2001

Barcelona, Spain

SEPTEMBER 12:

Arrival of participants and accomodation

SEPTEMBER 13:

9:30 Opening of the workshop: “Reciprocity as a Human Resource”:

Dr. Marianne Yagoubi, European Science Foundation

Dr. Jesús Contreras, President of the Divisió I de Ciències Humanes i Socials, Universitat de Barcelona

Dr. Susana Narotzky, Project leader and convenor.

10:00 Inaugural Debate Conference: “Is reciprocity an enlightening concept to address contemporary issues? A methodological debate”:

Dr. Enzo Mingione, Milan University

Dr. Gadi Algazi, Tel Aviv University

Dr. Ignasi Terradas, Department of Anthropology, Universitat de Barcelona.

11:30 Coffee Break

11:45 Debate

13:30 Lunch break

16:00 Session 1: “Reciprocity and public policy”

Participants:

Dr. Anna Bull and Dr.Susan Milner, University of Bath, United Kingdom.

“Social capital, grass-roots initiatives, local policies and regional regeneration: a comparative perspective of three European cities”

Dr. José Luis Molina and Alba Alayo, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, “Reciprocity today: the network of domestics units and public services in two collectives in Vic (Barcelona)”

Dr. Alexis Ferrand, Institut de Sociologie, Université de Lille, France.

“Reciprocal approbation and the forming of public opinion”

17:30 Debate

18.00 End of workday

SEPTEMBER 14:

9:45 Session 2: “Reciprocity, justice and injustice”

Participants:

Dr. Giovanni Levi, Università Ca’Foscari da Venezia, Italy.

“Equita’ e reciprocita’ fra Ancien Régime e societa’ contemporanea”

Dr. Paz Moreno, Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED), Madrid

“In search of the common good: negative reciprocity and competing or suspended moralities”

Dr. Cristina Larrea, Universitat de Barcelona,

“Water, sanitation, garbage: enviromental policy and reciprocity in a suburb of San Salvador de Bahia City”

11.00 Debate

11:30 Coffee Break

11:45 Session 3: “Reciprocity and globalization”.

Participants:

Dr. Ubaldo Martínez Veiga, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid.

“Immigrant labor: policies, civil rights, violence and the labor market: El Ejido (Almeria, Spain)”

Silvia Bofill, Universitat de Barcelona,

“The San Juan forestry in Michoacan as a model of successful sustainable regional development: negotiation and conflict in local, national and World Bank understandings of reciprocity”

Dr. Larissa Adler-Lomnitz, Universidad Nacional Autónoma México

“Reciprocity as a central form of exchange in complex societies: the case of the informal economy in Latin America and former communist societies”

13:00 Debate

13:30 Lunch break

16:00 Session 4: “Reciprocity and economic competitiveness”

Participants:

Dr. Dina Vaiou and Dr. Costis Hadjimichalis, National Technical Univ. of Athens, Greece.

“Informal work opportunities and the economic success of Kastoria in Northern Greece”

Dr. Ayse Bugra, Bogazici University, Istanbul, TR

“Contemporary transformation of a reciprocity based moral economy: the case of Turkey”

Dr. Susana Narotzky, Universitat de Barcelona and Dr. Gavin Smith, University of Toronto

“The political economy of affects: reciprocity and social capital in an industrial district in Southern Alicante, Spain”

17:30 Debate

18:00 End of workday

SEPTEMBER 15:

**10:00 Concluding debate:
“Reciprocity vs. social capital: issues of methodology, policy and politics”**

11:30 Coffee break

11:45 “Common interests and future collaboration: an agenda for a European network?”

13:30 Lunch.

End of workshop