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WOMEN IN SOLIDARITY ECONOMY IN GREECE: LIBERATION PRACTICES OR ONE MORE TASK UNDERTAKEN?

During the last years, particularly since 2009 onwards, schemes which enable their members to perform transactions without the use of official currency, are emerging and developing all over Greece. At almost the same time, collective grassroots arrangements for the provision of health and education services, like social medical centres and social educational centres, and for the provision of food, like collective land cultivation and the organisation of social kitchens, aspire to cover certain community needs which are not met anymore by the deteriorating individual income of citizens and by the public sector, which is under severe expenditure cuts.

Women are well involved in all those schemes, in both their coordination and management, but also in the production and sharing practices which are necessary in order that the schemes work. Not only in terms of numbers but also in terms of decision-making, women have very important roles within the schemes and their contributions are clearly (considered as) needed, respected and praised.

However, the main question concerning women's involvement in schemes where people do not use the official currency and/or try to undertake economic activities within a framework of solidarity instead of competition is: How do women handle the tension between the obligatory nature of their choices, given the high unemployment and poverty rates and the public expenditure cuts in terms of social services, and the will to explore new ways of arranging the satisfaction of individual and community material needs beyond the mainstream, capitalist and patriarchal market?

The paper's scope is to examine some main issues concerning this tension and how this is expressed through practical problems which the scheme members need to resolve in order to develop their activities and cover the needs aimed at. How do the scheme members, particularly women, find materials which are only produced in the mainstream market like medicines, books or certain food materials, which are needed within the schemes? How time management is important within the scheme and how do women cope with multiple tasks, their own personal, family and community needs and the needs of the scheme? How do scheme politics are affecting the role(s) of women within and outside the scheme, how tensions and disputes are resolved, how resources are allocated and re-shared so that the increasing individual, household and community needs are satisfied?

The paper includes field data acquired through empirical research, by the methods of observation by participation, text analysis, and the conduct of interviews with research participants.

Keywords: Greece, women, solidarity structures, transactions without official currency, community needs.