

## **Social Economics and the Solidarity City**

WHITE, Richard J.

Available from Sheffield Hallam University Research Archive (SHURA) at:

<https://shura.shu.ac.uk/28042/>

---

This document is the Accepted Version [AM]

**Citation:**

WHITE, Richard J. (2021). Social Economics and the Solidarity City. *Space and Polity*, 24 (3), 317-318. [Article]

---

**Copyright and re-use policy**

See <http://shura.shu.ac.uk/information.html>

## SOCIAL ECONOMICS AND THE SOLIDARITY CITY

*Richard J. White, Sheffield Hallam University.*

The pristine copy of *Social Economics and the Solidarity City* that first came into my possession has long since evolved into a book that bears all the signs of being well-thumbed, and well-read. Re-visiting its pages for this commentary I can only conclude that the hastily written notes found in the margins; the excitable underlining of sentences; not to mention the numerous exclamation and question marks peppered liberally throughout, all bear testament to the thought-provoking and provocative content that Brendan Murtagh has brought forward in this book. It should be stated before continuing that any critical reflections offered here are fully cognisant of the many positive foundations that *Social Economics and the Solidarity City* stands on. The focus here is particularly relevant to Chapters 3, “*Urban Politics and Alternative Economics*”; Chapter 4 “*Social and Solidarity Economics*” and Chapter 6, “*Actually Existing Solidarity Economies*.”

My long-standing engagement with the diverse economies of the western world has sought to unpack the geographies of self-help more fully, in particular by paying attention to the informal work-practices in the household (self-provisioning) and community self-help (mutual aid) (see White, 2010; White and Williams, 2016). In this context I have argued that many seemingly ordinary, routine “non-capitalist” forms of economic organisation, can be meaningfully understood and approached as important examples of anarchy-in-action (e.g. White and Williams, 2012; 2017). I mention this because it was with this finely tuned ‘anarchist economic geography’ antenna that the key premises and truth-claims made in the book were filtered through. My expectations that this book would appeal greatly to social anarchism were raised by the illustrations on the front cover, which depicted ‘people’, ‘coherency’, ‘volunteer(ing)’, ‘social resources’, ‘reciprocity’, ‘quality of life’, ‘engagement’, ‘social bonds’, ‘empathy’ and ‘team’. However, while important critiques of neoliberal economies, the state, the social economy, solidarity, the city and so on do draw on wider body/ies of critical literature, any fruitful engagement with anarchism, and anarchist geographers is conspicuous by its absence.

This is unfortunate, for I am convinced that there is much to be gained by seriously foregrounding anarchist thinkers, and that this would further extend many core themes and arguments in new and important directions. There are two areas that I’d see an explicitly *anarchist* intervention as being particularly worthwhile. The first is that this might influence a less cautious and more assertive appraisal of prefigurative praxis, as a means of further animating and underpinning the just city. I’m particular mindful here of the brilliant critique of neoliberalism by Simon Springer (2016), and the call to recognise the wonderful possibilities of non-hierarchical forms or

organization, horizontal politics and prefigurative praxis to open up new ways of moving beyond neoliberalism.

The second key intervention would be one of unleashing a radical political imaginary, by articulating new “post-statist” epistemologies (de la Torre and Ince 2016; Ferretti et al. 2020). How at a time of politico-economic crisis can we meaningfully start thinking *beyond* the state when debating how to mobilise solidarity ethics in the contemporary city. Such a combined endeavour, thinking beyond capitalism *and* beyond the state, opens up important new challenges and opportunities when debating crucial questions regarding “The Commons” and “Common-ing”. When reading the book I was very much minded of Jeppesen et. al's appraisal of the anarchist commons as...

“more than just the sum of its parts. It is a deep seated political project prefiguring a constantly evolving alternative political form based on principles of collective autonomy, self-determination, and self organization put into practice in the pleasure, work, everyday living, and activist organizing that make up all of our lives.” (2014, 897)

I'm confident that such a political project has a great deal to offer Murtagh's otherwise highly informed reading of the social economy as a means of re-vitalizing urban ethics and moving the rhetoric of the just city into local and global action. While the *anarchist shaped* dots could be traced and joined up more fully, this does not diminish the powerful illuminations and insights that the book raises. It is excellent, and I hope that similarly evolved i.e. well-thumbed copies will find their place on many other bookshelves.

## References

Federico, F. Ince, A., and White, R.J. 2020. Malatesta in Brexitland: Towards post-statist geographies of democracy. *Theory in Action*. Vol. 13 (1). Pp 137-160.

de la Torre, G.B. and Ince, A., 2016. Post-statist epistemology and the future of geographical knowledge production,. In M.L de Souza, R.J. White and S. Springer (Eds) *Theories of Resistance: Anarchism, Geography and the Spirit of Revolt*. Rowman & Littlefield. London. Pp 51-78.

Jeppesen, S., Kruzynski, A., Sarrisin, R. Breton, É. Collectif de Recherche sur l'Autonomie Collective (CRAC; Collective Autonomy Research Group) 2014. The anarchist commons. *Ephemera: theory & politics in organization*. Vol 14 (4):879-900

Nocella II, A., Shannon, D. and Asimakopoulos, J. eds., 2012. *The accumulation of freedom: writings on anarchist economics*. AK Press.

Springer, S., 2016. Fuck neoliberalism. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 15(2), pp.285-292.

White, R.J. 2010 Re-visiting the barriers to participation in mutual aid. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Politics*. Vol 31 (7/89) pp. 392-410.

White, R. J., & Williams, C. C. (2016). Beyond capitalocentrism: are non-capitalist work practices 'alternatives'?. *Area*, 48(3), 325-331.

White, R. J and Williams, C., 2017. 12 Crisis, capitalism, and the anarcho-geographies of community self-help. *Sharing Economies in Times of Crisis: Practices, Politics and Possibilities*.

White, R. J., & Williams, C. C. (2012). The pervasive nature of heterodox economic spaces at a time of neoliberal crisis: towards a “postneoliberal” anarchist future. *Antipode*, 44(5), 1625-1644.