

Finnish Anthropology Conference 2010: *Ideas of Value: Inquiries in Anthropology*  
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## Building the human economy: a question of value?

I have never been able to make the value question central to my intellectual, moral and political projects. This for several reasons: it encourages an abstract idealism, often adds spurious weight to unimpressive arguments and provides a verbal link between fields that have little else in common. But I may have missed something. So I launch this talk by considering the idea of value in Marx, principally through an interpretation by Desmond McNeill, and David Graeber's *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value* which is the most comprehensive recent treatment of the topic in our discipline.

With this review in mind, I present a project that I have been coordinating, the first English version of an attempt, going back to the World Social Forum in 2000, to assemble theoretical and practical reflections on alternative approaches to the economy, *The Human Economy: A Citizen's Guide* (Hart, Laville and Cattani editors, in press). The global crisis has generated interest in new approaches to organizing economic life. Would it not be better if we were to treat the economy as something made and remade by people themselves, rather than as an impersonal machine?

The object of a human economy is the reproduction of human beings and of whatever sustains life in general. Such an economy would serve the needs of whole persons and communities, not just a narrow individualism. It would express human variety in its local particulars as well as the interests of all humanity. The human economy is not a dream, but is rather based on knowledge of existing ideas and social practices found everywhere. Rather than treat concepts like social capital, fair trade, globalization, alternative energy and moral economy as separate discourses, this collection provides a language for thinking about how to make a better world.

The question of value is not tackled directly in this book. But this could be a serious omission, one that the talk, indeed the conference as a whole, could provide an opportunity to rectify.