

Chapter 5

An Alternative Heterotopia Against Consumer Culture: Time Banking Project as a New Perspective Into the Gift Economy in Network Society

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the heterotopia phenomenon in light of utopian function defined by Ernst Bloch that has created utopian movements from past to present. This is in The Principles of Hope and based on new cultural policies of a developing network society. It aims to make a contribution to the literature of cultural studies regarding new media by dealing with the ethos of phenomenon via sociologic, philosophic, and marketing perspectives. To this effect, the relation between the social network, one of the productions of cultural policies that are closely related to social media platforms nowadays and the consumption culture, is the focus of the study. In the analysis, the study deals with zumbara.com case, a time banking project based on a gift economy that is chosen in regard to the topic.

INTRODUCTION

The function of *Liquid modernity*, introduced by Zygmunt Bauman, which determines, mediates and leads the flow of life contemporarily corresponds to social network. Thus, it is highly difficult for social scientists that try to have a grasp of social phenomena and process in the related field to evaluate network culture that is a difficult field to limit and define in only one discipline. This paper, therefore, deals with *Utopia* concept included in political philosophy and sociology field through interdisciplinary literature review based on sociology and economic policies of cultural practices in digital networks. Consequently, the study aims to establish an academic ground with the aim of discussing current issues of network society.

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Is mass utopian ethos currently replaced by individuality culture? Or is the spirit of utopia gone forever? The answers to these questions require searching in social dynamics of virtual societies developed based on collective mind in network society. It is crucial to have a better look to gift phenomenon and sharing platforms that are not based on money economy while trying to suggest alternative solutions for excessive consumption in an advanced consumer society that also requires dealing network with economy politics.

The gift economy concept that belongs to archaic period anterior to modern market economy has been reinterpreted in the modern, atomized, heterogeneous cultural platforms and revives as a consumption-production style, alternative to the current capitalist economy. Thus, heterotopia phenomenon as a reference to the transformation of utopian function after modernism and later, as established by Michel Foucault on the basis of space and place metaphors, finds itself a new example. The space is called *Time Banking Project* this time in heterotopia in which the imaginarieness and perfection notions of traditional utopia are replaced by reality and feasibility. This system represents an alternative connection for individuals who would otherwise be oblivious to the needs and gifts each can offer. Also, individual-based time banking is a modifier and sociable experiment in building community. Mainly the system is supporting and binding people together, while building joy and enthusiasm for what needs to be done.

Time banking system, is intended to build community through co-production, rather than co-consuming by returning gift into exchanges. The fundamental idea behind time banking is deeply egalitarian, because everyone's time is valued equally, and everyone starts out with the same amount of it. The project's stand point is; "Our choice of how to spend time is our choice of how to live life." And no matter how wealthy or not, it is impossible to buy more time, it will be an equalizing force in society. The time banking project healing especially in fragmented local communities and their sub-cultured products and it is all about Do It Yourself Utopian ethos.

The time banking project serves as a middle road on the way back to a gift-based economy, a tool to help individuals about relationship, labor, equality and sharing. From this point of view, the spirit of the system is related to utopian function.

The current political economy reveals that the needs are infinite, and resources are finite and this situation leads both individuals and enterprises to different economic pursuits. Therefore, an alternative based on sustainability beyond gaining maximum benefits and profits from resources is required in our modern world and accordingly themes such as sharing economy and common use practices regain value. It is well-known that there exist sharing platforms based on sharing economy that can be defined as a shopping system in which a needed service or goods is offered to other users in need by an expert marketer when that service or goods is not used by the owner and the marketer gets a commission out of usage fee paid by the user. However, time banking project is different from sharing economy or barter economy in that the first is completely based on gift exchange and gift economy is one in which services or goods are given without an agreement as to a suitable payment or trade to be made in return. Time banking project based on gift economy through the revision of primitive premises by Eisentein is distinct from others in that neither founders nor users have profits related to money. The purpose of this study is to examine the operation and development of gift economy with an example of zumbara.com that is one of the social networking platforms and a first and unique time banking project established in Turkey and to discuss its heterotopic value from the standpoint of utopian function.

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