

Chapter 2

Money as a Cultural Artifact: An Economic Anthropology Analysis of Its Social and Environmental Impacts

Silvio Andrae

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8586-7812>

Independent Researcher, Germany

ABSTRACT

This theoretical study examines money as a cultural artifact in the context of planetary boundaries and social inequality. Starting from the assumption that money is more than a neutral medium of exchange, the article analyzes its semiotic, material, and social dimensions. It integrates perspectives from economic anthropology, systems theory, and network theory with ecological economics, proposing six theses that shed light on the tension between abstraction, infrastructure, power, and meaning in modern monetary systems. Methodologically, the study combines an interdisciplinary literature and concept analysis with the design of a theoretically sound research program. It argues that the current monetary system in the Anthropocene has both ecologically destabilizing and socially selective effects. The outlook discusses the potential of alternative monetary architectures—such as indexed, earmarked, or multicentric

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3373-1260-6.ch002

currencies—to reintegrate economic, social, and ecological goal systems. The study aims to contribute to a transformative monetary theory in the context of global upheaval.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, economic and anthropological research has shown a growing interest in the cultural dimension of money. This shift in perspective—away from the idea of money as a neutral medium of exchange and toward an analysis of money as a socially embedded, symbolically charged, and materially effective artifact—is not only an expression of theoretical diversification, but also an epistemological necessity. It should be noted that classical positions, such as Karl Polanyi's substance-oriented approach or Stephen Gudeman's theory of 'populated economies,' as well as network-theoretical perspectives of actor-network theory, show that money is a historically grown, culturally framed, and technically-institutionally structured medium that stabilizes central social patterns of order (Maurer, 2006; Hornborg, 2024b).

Parallel to this theoretical movement, a new awareness of the problem has emerged. Global crisis dynamics—such as growing wealth inequality, climate-related resource conflicts, and the exclusion of large sections of the population from the financial system—make it clear that money reproduces not only economic but also social and ecological orders. Worldwide, two billion people are excluded from basic financial services. It is not due to technical barriers, but instead to normative and administrative mechanisms of exclusion. Empirical asymmetries of this kind are often not questioned, not least because money is taken for granted. It is precisely this taken-for-grantedness—its everyday omnipresence and apparent neutrality—that obscures the symbolic, political, and ecological mechanisms of monetary systems.

The historically deep-rooted origin of this problematic decoupling lies in the idea of general-purpose money, i.e., a form of money that is universally applicable and in which all values can be compared on a numerical scale. According to Polanyi (2001 [1944]), this principle enables heterogeneous goods, social relationships, and ecological processes to be subjected to a

40 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/money-as-a-cultural-artifact/390813

Related Content

A Secure Knowledge Resource Management Theory for IT/IS Outsourcing: The Service Provider Perspective

Kevin Duncan and Evan Duggan (2014). *International Journal of Human Capital and Information Technology Professionals* (pp. 55-69).

www.irma-international.org/article/a-secure-knowledge-resource-management-theory-for-its-outsourcing/105574

An Organisational Culture Model for Comparative Studies and Assessment of IT Projects

Imran U. Khan, Abel Usoro and Grzegorz Majewski (2012). *International Journal of Human Capital and Information Technology Professionals* (pp. 63-83).

www.irma-international.org/article/organisational-culture-model-comparative-studies/66099

Distance Education and E-Learning across Cultures

(2012). *Intercultural Rhetoric and Professional Communication: Technological Advances and Organizational Behavior* (pp. 186-215).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/distance-education-learning-across-cultures/62107

Building a Sustainable Talent Acquisition Model in a Dynamic Business Environment

Mamta Mohapatra and Priyanka Sahu (2018). *International Journal of Human Capital and Information Technology Professionals* (pp. 42-52).

www.irma-international.org/article/building-a-sustainable-talent-acquisition-model-in-a-dynamic-business-environment/205651

Psychological Impacts of Remote Working Under Social Distancing Restrictions

Oliver Baumann and Elizabeth (Libby) J. Sander (2021). *Handbook of Research on Remote Work and Worker Well-Being in the Post-COVID-19 Era* (pp. 1-17).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/psychological-impacts-of-remote-working-under-social-distancing-restrictions/275112