



Call for papers for an *ephemera* special issue on:

What are the alternatives? Organizing for a socially and ecologically sustainable world

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The hegemonic grip of neoliberal ideas, and in particular the capitalist market economy, has been increasingly subject to critique from organization studies scholars. For Parker et al (2014), this is because capitalism is not only a means to order the production of goods and services, but creates ‘obedient’ producers and consumers who uncritically accept the myth that there is no alternative (see also Shiva, 2014). Despite the growing interest in these concerns (for example, see the *ephemera* call for a special issue on ‘Organizing for the post-growth economy’) it could be argued that organization studies has, to some extent, colluded in the perpetuation of this myth. As Valerie Fournier has pointed out: ‘if one looks at the field of organization studies specifically, one may be forgiven for thinking that there aren’t many alternatives to capitalist corporations’ (2002: 189). Today much of this discussion remains at the fringe of organization and management discourse, but has long been passionately argued over within the many movements who are working towards a socially and ecologically just world.

This special issue seeks to explore the myriad of alternative ways of organizing that are striving to address the social and environmental challenges we currently face. These include, but are not limited to, collectivist approaches (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979) such as cooperatives, community owned enterprises and communal living, and usually though not exclusively these focus on specific localities. Alternative practices include freeganism (the sourcing and reusing of disposed items – see Kurutz, 2007; Starr, 2010), open source technology (Pearce, 2012), and the revitalisation of movements seeking social change, such as Occupy, and Idle No More, challenging the ongoing impact of

neo-colonial practices on indigenous women and youth in Canada. Many of these initiatives are anti-globalization, anti-consumerist and, in the Global South, anti-development. They tend to have been built from the bottom up and espouse inclusivity and participative action. They seek to prioritise the well-being of people, communities and nature above profit maximization, and indeed to fundamentally challenge ideas around profit, growth and capitalist forms of exchange (Langley and Mellor, 2002; North, 2010). Some may aim for autonomy and to 'disengage from capitalist (...) systems to build new forms of social and economic relationships and identities' (Wilson 2013: 720).

There is an emergent literature on ways to decentre organization driven by capitalist imperatives. The New Economics Foundation calls for a 'Great Transition' (Ryan-Collins, 2009), in order to develop a fundamentally new economy based on sustainability, equality and stability. Scott-Cato and Hillier (2010) and Gibson-Graham (2008; 2006) argue that this will take place in the spaces left by current institutions through micropolitical processes which focus on a critical emancipation towards alternative systems. There has been work on alternative organization (Parker et al, 2014), imagining alternatives (Wright et al, 2013), and insights from counter-cultural forms of economy and organization (Parker, 2011). These could suggest how already existing alternatives in the here and now might begin to unlock 'the potential for a range of diverse possibilities beyond capitalism' (Wilson, 2013: 720). We also invoke long histories of critical reflection within alternative movements, including academics who write as insiders or implicated participant-observers/observing-participants on the promise, perils, and necessity of developing alternative modes of organizing (Lorde, 1984; Freeman, 1972).

Pinning down what is meant by alternative, and the significance of alternative organization is a work in progress. Gibson-Graham et al (2013) argue that the very label 'alternative' marginalizes non-dominant ways of organizing such that their credibility can be questioned. At the same time, being perceived as alternative could be part of an identity project of 'being minority' in which 'becoming mainstream' undermines and devalues its counter-cultural, -economic and -political status. However, for many, these alternatives enable experimentation in the politics of the possible, in order to seek a fundamentally changed society (Chatterton, 2010).

It is also the case that whilst there is extensive critique of our dominant, conventional means of organization, less has been said about the diverse nature of the various forms of organizing and the concerns that might arise from alternative organization, such as the effect of value-intensive, high-commitment cultures or the problems associated with organizations that become cult-like. And, how can non-dominant forms of organization move centre-stage to create a future, better world without being co-opted and colonized by capitalism? To what extent do they challenge or reproduce existing patterns or interrelations, gendered hierarchies and practices of inclusion/exclusion? Alternative movements have long grappled with the

tensions of working towards better futures, while embroiled in the often intractable nature of hegemonic modes of organizing. This call for papers therefore seeks to extend and deepen our understanding of conceptual, empirical and critical accounts of alternative organization, and their possibilities, with the aim of contributing to an alternative future.

Possible topics include, but are not limited to, the following:

- The relationships between visions of alternative futures and critical reflections on modes of organizing alternative futures
- Impact of alternative organization, including the effect on the community, participants, changing relationships between producers and consumers and neoliberalism
- Embodiment and alternative organization: the experience of alternative movements
- The critical temporalities of imagining alternative organization
- Failures in alternative organizations, particularly around race, class, gender, sexuality, disability and North/South relations, and the challenges of dealing with multiple vectors of oppression.
- Challenges facing alternative organizations: the perils and promise of social media; the damage of policing within movements; co-optation of alternative organizations; and concomitantly focus on the sustainability of movements; building coalitions; efforts to learn from failure;
- Spatial politics in alternative organization
- Ethico-politics and alternative organization
- What values, principles and ethics can help us create points of departure for alternative organizations

Deadline for submissions: 28th February 2016

All contributions should be submitted to one of the issue editors: Emma Jeanes (e.jeanes@ex.ac.uk), Mary Phillips (Mary.Phillips@bristol.ac.uk) and Niamh Moore (niamh.moore@ed.ac.uk). Please note that three categories of contributions are invited for the special issue: articles, notes, and reviews. All submissions should follow *ephemera's* submissions guidelines (www.ephemerajournal.org/how-submit). Articles will undergo a double blind review process. Information about these types of contributions can be found at: <http://www.ephemerajournal.org/call-for-papers>. For further information, please contact one of the special issue editors.

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