



Our money: Our place
Exploring 'Puma LETS as a micro-political tool in the context of economic crisis'

A Research Paper presented by:

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for obtaining the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Major:

**Governance, Policy and Political Economy
(GPPE)**

Specialization:

Local Development Strategies (LDS)

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December 2014

Disclaimer:

This document represents part of the author's study programme while at the Institute of Social Studies. The views stated therein are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Institute.

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Acknowledgments

In this journey I often found myself as if I was somehow stepping between two different worlds. During my research about Puma LETS, I had to take a city bus to reach the site of my research. Despite being a short trip of no more than twenty minutes, I felt as if I was abandoning a world where money is the measure of all things, escaping from impersonal shopping malls and consumerism, and entering into an exciting place where mutual support, care and solidarity were the ruling values. I am deeply indebted to all the people who opened the doors of such an exciting place as *La Casa del Pumarejo*. Thank you, everyone there, for sharing with me your personal stories; thank you for reminding me that there are other ways of building, reappropriating and creating collectively. In a time of uncertainty you give me hope and inspiration, showing me the true meanings of the words 'care' and 'solidarity'.

I also want to thank those who supported me during this ride:

First, my family: thank you for your love and support. I am especially grateful to my parents, who have always encouraged me to think outside the box. Thanks for your sincere belief in me. In every accomplishment of my life, you are present.

Second, I am sincerely grateful to those along this journey who have contributed to this paper. My closest friends from Seville who give me shelter to study, my job colleagues who listened to me patiently during the challenging moments, and my group of friends in my hometown who tried their best during the summer months to distract me from this research paper! I am also grateful to people who made my experience in ISS invaluable. Thanks for all the moments of laughter; you have all contributed to my personal and professional enrichment.

Third, I want to thank Georgina Gómez for her guidance and trust. For those emails, saying '*Dale Cristina, one last effort!*'. In the fuzzy moments, you headed me in the right direction, helping me to see things from many different angles. I want to thank also Erhard Berner and Cecilia McGuire, for their constructive criticism and suggestions during this research. Also, my gratitude to Javier Lloveras who generously shared his PhD thesis on Puma LETS, a work that often helped me to find the missing pieces of the puzzle.

Fourth, and most importantly, I want to thank the person who was by my side in this year and a half. Thanks for having the generosity to let me go and alter our 'normal' daily routine. *Gracias, J.M.V.*

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List of Acronyms

CCS	Community currency system
LETS	Local Exchange Trading Systems
NADPP	Neighbours Association in Defence of Pumarejo <i>Casa</i>
ODS	Office of Social Rights
PCA	Pumarejo Casa Association

Abstract

This research paper looks at a Local Exchange Trading Scheme (LETS) called 'Puma' that is being deployed within the Pumarejo neighbourhood in the Spanish city of Seville. The research that is presented focuses on analysing the scheme in terms of a micro-political tool deployed by a local community to achieve the creation of an autonomous space in order to re-embed economic and cultural practices into a more human and sustainable scale. In particular, the research aims to explain why and how Puma LETS emerged; analysing what is the institutional process of developing an economic institution from below, and what is the current type of governance system in this scheme.

As an entry point, a review of literature on community local currency systems is provided to aid understanding of the main features of a LETS system, and how a particular community might envisage these types of community currencies (CCs) as a micro-political tool to achieve its political claims. Secondly, the research addresses Pumarejo's neighbourhood tradition of autonomous politics of place, describing the specific needs that existed in community when Puma LETS was deployed. Thirdly, the political opportunity is described which triggered collective action and enabled Puma LETS promoters to mobilise local resources within the community. The final part of the paper focuses on analyzing the type of internal governance system within the currency.

Relevance to Development Studies

There is an emergent interest among academics and activists in studying grassroots, alternative economic practices as contributions towards social justice and environmental sustainability, especially given the contemporary economic debates about the changing nature of the practices of capitalism in the context of the global economic crisis. This research offers a particularly interesting opportunity to make visible a practical experience of expanding the understanding of alternative economic practices as everyday micro-political actions of resistance by ordinary people. In addition, the concept of 'flexible institutionalisation' offers an interesting analytical perspective to address internal rules of the governance of LETS.

Keywords

Community currencies, LETS, de-growth, autonomy, micro-politics, social movements, institutional economics.

Chapter 1

Setting the scene

1.1. Money as an island of cooperation in the middle of the crisis

‘*Palé*’, the Spanish version of the classic game ‘Monopoly’, is a rather old game that was very popular in the 80s when I was young. The rules were easy, each player was provided with two hundred units of ‘*Palé* money’. Players would take turns to throw the dice and move their piece forward, around a circuit of small boxes named with streets in Madrid. If you were lucky enough to arrive at a box before another player, you could buy the street and then make other players pay a rent every time they stopped at your street. In fact, during the first rounds there was high competition among players to accumulate as many properties as they could. You had to move fast because if you were able to invest your *Palé* money well in buying all the properties of the same colour you could build ‘houses’ on that street. In this way, every time a player stopped in a street of your property you could get even higher rents in the future. That made you richer and others poorer. The rules of the game stated that the game was over when one player became the wealthiest and the other players went bankrupt. This classic game illustrates three basic principles of conventional national currency and monetary systems: they promote competition, individual accumulation and money scarcity.

However, not everyone knows that an earlier version of Monopoly, called ‘The Landlord’s Game’ and designed in 1903 by Lizzie Magie, had rules that allowed players to do something not officially allowed in ‘*Palé*’: to cooperate with each other (Ketcham. 2012). This alternative set of rules encouraged co-operative rather than competitive play so ‘players could agree to cooperate with each other, paying rents not to a property’s title holder but into a common pool, and achieve shared prosperity’ (ibid.).

Before the 2008 economic crisis, life in Spain seemed very much like a *Palé* game. The system encouraged competition, and players were spending their money massively in buying, renting and selling properties because, amongst other things, tax regulation encouraged ownership, credit from banks was easy to obtain and real estate prices were in seemingly endless growth. However, in 2008 the speculative bubble burst, and after a sudden collapse in prices, the value of the assets went down. As a consequence credit conditions became tougher for Spanish banks, which were borrowing money on the international markets to lend to homebuyers. Many of the smaller, weaker banks, struggling with massive losses, went bankrupt because they could not repay their loans. The Spanish economy entered into recession, its effects manifested in an unprecedented rate of unemployment. Many indebted families could no longer cope with their mortgages and debts and, just like in a *Palé* game, many players went bankrupt and lost their houses.

However, after the economic meltdown, a few local communities in different parts of Spain reacted to 2008's economic meltdown by playing a sort of

‘The Landlord’s Game’. Building economic institutions from below, they introduced cooperation in the rules of the game, issuing and managing a cooperation-inducing type of currency to reconstruct social and economic life with different kinds of values in which competition, individual accumulation and money scarcity were replaced by the values of ‘sharing, solidarity, equality and fraternity’ (Latouche 2009:94).

These local communities created their own money under the assumption that conventional money like the euro is a socially-constructed institution. This idea draws upon a whole tradition that, since Polanyi (1944), has been called upon to contest the economic orthodox model (see for example Gibson-Graham 2006), challenging the artificial neutrality of money which capitalism assumes (North 2010:79). From this foundation, modern money is ‘neither so universal, homogenous, disembodied from society or geographically-neutral’, but ‘socially embedded’, and ‘attached to a variety of social relations’ (Polanyi 1944, as cited in Seyfang 2000:236). In this regard, Lietaer has proposed a definition of community money as ‘an agreement, within a community, to use something as a means of payment’ (Lietaer 2013:47)

This research looks at one of these local communities that has created its own money as an island of cooperation in the middle of the crisis. In particular it examines a currency called ‘Puma’, which is being deployed in a neighbourhood known as Pumarejo, in the Spanish city of Seville. Puma was deployed by a coalition of ordinary people who were integrated by de-growth activists, activists coming from the Neighbours Association in Defence of the Pumarejo Palace (House-Palace Pumarejo)¹, as well as a large number of local residents. In their view, this type of money could respond better to existing community needs than regular money. In this particular case, it has been argued that the creation of a complementary currency system was led by a stronger political resistance component than other currencies deployed in other parts of the country.

Puma LETS was officially launched in March 2012, and started with a small group of twenty participants exchanging goods and services with Pumas. By November 2013, just eighteen months after Puma LETS was deployed, there were already over 800 participants coming from other areas of the city. With that scale, Puma LETS ran into trouble and around the end of 2013 the currency started a process of institutional reconstruction that Puma LETS promoters termed a ‘hibernation period’. Since then, to ensure long-term sustainability, membership has been restricted and new internal rules have been introduced. In the current phase, the scheme has grown in organisational complexity as well as in professionalism, adopting a pragmatic project and goal orientation, although simultaneously it remains a highly informal structure that encourages individual autonomy and creativity. It is precisely the coexistence

of these two elements - institutionalisation and flexibility - which represent a particularly interesting topic for research.

Although this research is looking at the politics and the contextual conditions behind the establishment of Puma LETS, in order to provide the reader with some background information, the following paragraphs will briefly describe the main benefits of the scheme in terms of local development.

Following Helmsing's argument that CCS might be beneficial in terms of 'enterprise development effects' as well 'community economic development'² (Helmsing 2003, 2004 as cited in Gomez and Helmsing 2008:2505), data collection demonstrates that Puma LETS has represented on the one hand a possibility of household level income diversification, and on the other, the creation of micro-enterprises. Regarding household level income diversification effects, although members from the beginning recognised that the intention was not to provide a main source of income, Puma LETS has provided the means to facilitate re-deploying skills and competencies which can be used to generate a source of income that in turn may be used to satisfy 'basic needs' and access to basic services for those excluded from the labour market. A member expressed it this way: 'For me it is a complementary income, and often the main part of my economy because I have no other job' (Personal interview A8).

Regarding the creation of micro-enterprises, some participants have been able to build alternative livelihood strategies outside what they view as the 'exploitation of the regular labour market' (Personal interview 7). They find within Puma LETS a friendlier atmosphere than outside, because 'working like this is priceless (...); this was the first time I could work with my own rhythms, it was my responsibility, I just had to be accountable to myself' (Personal interview A7). Other members found that Puma LETS provided a springboard into entrepreneurship and into the formal labour market, since the currency also provided a network of people willing to invest or join in with the project. 'You meet people who are also doing similar things, and that opens up the path to begin to take the first steps' (Personal interview A4).

In addition to previous local economic development effects, Puma LETS has strengthened community ties, similarly to other CCS. For the majority of the respondents Puma LETS was not a temporary patch on the crisis. Data collection suggests that participants have considered that Puma LETS is more than a currency as it provides a network of mutual aid, characterised by strong bonds of solidarity and community feeling that, in the end, will enhance social integration and create a more human space for social life. In their own words:

'In the end, we have created ties which are not limited to the currency but derive from friendships and relationships. For example now Sena, my dog, will stay for a month in another mem-

ber's house. Those things are unthinkable even among members of your own family' (Personal interview A4).

Previous research on CCS have focused on the effects of the currency in terms of local development (Gomez and Helmsing 2008; Seyfang, 2001), however since behind the establishment of Puma LETS members seek more political goals, this research will focus on analysing Puma LETS as a tool of micro-politics, hence the economic effects of puma LETS remains a topic for further research.

The research will try to answer the following research question: in what way is CC a tool of micro-politics of resistance to the capitalist model dominant in Spain?

This will be guided, in turn, by particular theoretical framework and sub-questions in each chapter. Looking at the politics and the contextual conditions behind the establishment of a community currency in Pumajero, Chapter 3 and 4 and will try to provide an answer to following questions: 'Which embedding mechanisms conditioned Puma LETS functions and practices as a micro-political tool?' and 'What were the contextual factors that motivated de-growth activists to get involved in the task of deploying a community currency within Pumarejo?' Chapter 5 will address the rule of governance by non-state actors, attempting to answer: 'What are the main features of the rule of governance system that characterise the current phase of Puma LETS?' Finally, Chapter 6 will outline the main conclusions of this research paper.

1.2. Research strategy

Due to the multiple theoretical concepts and approaches deployed in this research, it is not possible to use a single theoretical framework. Each chapter provides a particular analytical framework as a kind of toolkit for understanding the contents deployed in each chapter. Chapter 2 is an introductory chapter that reviews literature to conceptualise the different perspectives in viewing community currencies, emphasising the micropolitical perspective that considers LETS schemes as tools for localised resistance. As has been argued, community currencies are 'socially embedded' (Polanyi 1944); therefore in line with this argument Chapter 3 describes the two embedding elements which have strongly conditioned Puma LETS functions and practices as a micro-political tool: the long history of autonomous politics within Pumarejo and the specific needs that existed in the community in the context of economic crisis. Drawing upon resource mobilisation and political process theorists, Chapter 4 describes the specific contextual surroundings of the establishment of Puma LETS, emphasising the importance of taking advantage of a political opportunity by gaining access and mobilising communal resources as a necessary step to transform the potential for mobilisation into action. From an institutional theory perspective, Chapter 5 examines the institutional process of institutional construction and analyses the new rules of governance introduced after a period of internal reflection, the 'hibernation period' within Puma LETS. In this chapter two concrete practices of Puma LETS are presented (namely 'Caring practices' and 'Supplying Centre working group practices') to illustrate how the

scheme is characterised in the current phase by a ‘flexible institutionalisation’ type of governance system. Finally Chapter 6 brings concluding remarks and outlines the main contribution of the scheme in terms of economic and social local development.

In order to address the research questions the study was designed as a qualitative single case study. Selecting a case study as the method to conduct the research offered the possibility to understand the specific context and dynamics of the neighbourhood in depth. In the present work situation, convenience and accessibility to gain access to the scheme were also important in the process of selecting the relevant case.

Besides the theoretical relevance of the case selected, Puma LETS emerged as a suitable case to undertake my ethnographic enquiry into a CCS because the Pumarejo neighbourhood was twenty minutes by bus from my permanent residence in Seville. Indeed, during fieldwork, this proved to be very useful to engage with the realities of the Pumarejo neighbourhood. In this regard, gaining access to the research site involved negotiations with Puma LETS that were straightforward since the members were used to hosting researchers. In fact, at the time of conducting my research a young researcher from France and a journalist from Italy were also conducting data collection about the scheme.

The fieldwork period lasted from 22nd of June to 8th of September 2014. During that time I spent long periods in participatory action research, engaging in activities with other Puma members that included participation in the weekly Supplying Centre, undertaking rehabilitation work in Pumarejo *Casa*, being a speaker for Puma LETS on radio programmes or attending different workshops organised by Puma LETS members.

The overall research strategy focused on three units of analysis:

- (i) **Time and space**, comprising community path and place dependency.
- (ii) **Members of the Puma LETS.** My focus was on the subjective experiences of Puma LETS promoters as well as experiences from local producers participating in the weekly Supplying Centre³.
- (iii) **Organisational dynamics**, comprising everyday organisational practices, culture and identity, mobilisation of resources and interactions with local producers as well as with civil society actors within Pumarejo.

The qualitative research strategy was based on a combination of formal and informal methods of data collection, which involved the following:

- a) **Ethnographic methods:** In line with Abbott's arguments 'the subjective and the personal have the potential to enhance knowledge of the specific context of research as well as general issues of development' (Abbott 2007:209). The subjective potential of ethnography was a crucial aspect of the research because it allowed me to gain access to the subjective experiences and emotions of Puma LETS members. Before starting the fieldwork I became aware that Puma LETS promoters were burned out through having so many research visits to study the currency. Therefore, during my ethnographic inquiry I attempted to prioritise engagement, reflexivity and collaboration to build trust and empathy with the members of the scheme. My intention was to show solidarity and give something back into the scheme.

I gathered information through the following methods:

- **Informal data collection events, interactions and conversations:** I gathered information in informal activities, among others in birthday celebrations, or having food and drink in the crowded bars of Plaza del Pumarejo. Another crucial source of information proved to be lunches with the community after participating in the rehabilitation sessions of Pumarejo *Casa*.
- **Participant observation.** My intention was to spend a substantial period of participant observation and informal data collection before conducting ethnographic interviews with key informants. From day one I took part in a large number of Puma LETS activities. Despite being more an observer in some occasions and on other occasions being more a participant, from day one I became aware during the fieldwork that 'the ethnographer inevitably shapes the social landscape and phenomena that she studies through the choices she makes, giving an account of her personality and life by the choices she makes' (Malkki and Cerwonka 2007:24). During these participant observations I used to write field notes, because it helped me to give an account of the context and conditions under which data was obtained, as well as to write down reflections over my observations during the fieldwork.
- **Photography.** I used photography as a data collection tool, this study also used photographs in which I mainly focused on objects, physical barriers, symbols, messages in the walls, etc. In the few cases where I took photographs of people, risk of refusal by participants was overcome by verbally requesting of participants whether I could take images, explaining to them that photography was one of the data collection methods I was

using in my study. The aim was to illuminate aspects that at first sight could appear mundane or taken for granted, but that could illuminate abstract categories such as 'care', 'affection' or 'autonomy' in powerful ways. Photography was also used as a sort of personal memory tool complementing my fieldnotes.

- **Ethnographic interviews with key informants:** The ethnographic nature of my research enabled me to build previous relationships of rapport and establish relationships before formally interviewing them as informants. The interviews with key informants lasted between 50 and 90 minutes and they were recorded in audio and transcribed. Interviews were unstructured but there were general areas that I was interested in: how the respondent came to Puma LETS; in which activities the respondent was currently, or had been in the past, involved in; how he or she had experienced the hibernation period, and which were his or her future expectations about Puma LETS after the hibernation period. Previous engagement in the activities of the currency proved to make the interactions very smooth during the interviews. As far as the selection of key informants was concerned, besides any previous rapport, the main criteria applied to select interviewees were to be part of the steering group or to be a local producer within the Supplying Centre. (*For the Interviewees' demographic characteristics, see Appendix I.*)
- b) **Revision of secondary sources of information:** The documentation was related to the recent history of the neighbourhood produced by the community as well as documents produced by Puma LETS (brochures, internal emails, social media, websites, blogs, podcasts and online videos). A particularly relevant source proved to be the internal mailing list, since on my first day Puma LETS added my own email address to this list so I had access to all internal emails of the scheme. These emails were interesting because I could have access to data about internal conflicts 'behind the scenes' among the participants, a type of data which is usually covered over and takes time to obtain.

The research will stress the perspective of 'situated knowledges' (Haraway 1988) which considers knowledge as 'situated' and therefore 'partial'. From this epistemologic position it is crucial to reflect on the positionality of the researcher, since 'our social roles are always relationally negotiated, hybrid, corporeal and contingent' (Castree 2003 as cited in Chatterton 2006:272) and assume that the identity of both activists and non-activists can be challenged and reconfigured. During the fieldwork, I situated myself as a young female student who was burned out due to working in the Regional Government of Andalusia and who had taken a year off to do her Masters degree in a Dutch university. Being critical of institutionalised politics, as well as the fact that I knew in depth the realities and history of the Pumarejo neighbourhood, proved to be

very helpful, since these enhanced points of commonality with Puma LETS promoters. However, one crucial positive aspect proved to be my open interest in giving back something to the community, including helping out with the rehabilitation work within Pumarejo *Casa*.

Conducting the fieldwork period during the summer months was a great limitation to conduct my initial research design. From June to August Puma LETS was not very active and it was difficult to engage with residents in Pumarejo because high temperatures limit people's mobility. Moreover, the Municipality was conducting works in the main square of the neighbourhood and at the same time Pumarejo Association was also doing rehabilitation work within Pumarejo *Casa*. As a result, social activities such as Mercapuma⁴ or the summer cinema did not take place during the fieldwork period. In the end, contrary to my primary intention on focusing my attention on those members experiencing economic difficulties or social exclusion, I could only engage with a small group of most 'activist-type' members within Puma LETS.

In addition, I was not able to engage in trade exchanges with any Puma member. Puma promoters agreed to provide me with a passbook but because such decisions have to be approved in general assembly they could not officially register me as a Puma member until mid-September.

The following pictures illustrate some of the main challenges and limitations found during fieldwork.

Figure 1.1. View of works at Pumarejo Square



Source: Fieldwork 2014

Figure 1.2. View of works at the Pumarejo *Casa*



Source: Fieldwork 2014

Chapter 2

Conceptualising community currency systems (CCS)

Community currency systems (CCS) are usually deployed in circumstances of recession as a way to overcome money shortage, but in recent years they have been developed in different countries as strategic tools to foster more economic, social, environmental and ethical objectives (Seyfang, 2001b:61). Although the context surrounding the emergence of Puma LETS was a long and deep recession and the currency, according to North's typology of motivations for developing a CCS, could also be considered an 'environmental focus' scheme (North and Unit 2000:6), one main claim of this research is that Puma LETS fits better into North's motivational category of 'social movement approach' (Ibid.). In this regard, the present work will present the view that Puma LETS promoters were inspired by its micro-political emancipatory potential to build a more autonomous, humane and ecological economy as an alternative to the mainstream economy.

The first section of this chapter reviews the literature on CCS, emphasising the main features of a LETS system as well as certain practical aspects of Puma LETS. The second section concentrates on situating Puma LETS within a strand of the literature which considers LETS as localised micro-political resistance tool.

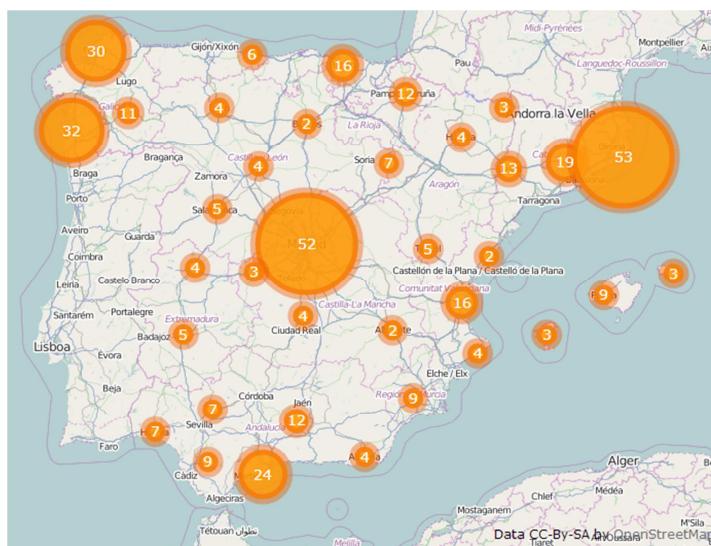
2.1. An introduction to community currency systems (CCS) and the main features of local exchange trading systems (LETS)

Puma LETS is one of the many examples of non-state monetary systems that have been implemented in recent decades around the world. These systems have been termed complementary or community currency systems (CCS). According to Elkin's definition they comprise a 'self-regulating economic network in which members issue their own money aiming to achieve the needs of a bounded community (Elkin 1986 as cited in Gómez 2009:5). CCS include different types such as the *moneda sociale* in Italy, local exchange trading systems (LETS) in English speaking countries, *monnaies parallèles* in France, or the *Red de Trueque (RT)* in Argentina (Gómez 2009:21).

Criteria for classifying CCS are established by Seyfang, who distinguishes between: time currencies, paper currencies and local exchange trading system (LETS) (Seyfang 2001b:63). The first type involves pure time exchange schemes; they are built on multilateral reciprocity. The aim is to help vulnerable groups such as the elderly, women, or any person who needs support. In this case services are valued with time. These types of schemes have spread to

Germany, Sweden, Japan, UK and are widespread across Spain. Paper currencies are notes that are printed and allowed to circulate freely among members of a particular community. The Ithaca Hours in the United States or the *Red de Trueque* (RT) in Argentina are the best known examples. LETS are 'a type of cashless trading organisation, usually run by community volunteers, in which members trade goods and services among themselves' (Seyfang 2001a:976). The idea is that communities create a parallel 'local currency' that does not necessarily involve the circulation of physical notes or coins, and which can only be used within a geographically bound area (Blanc 2011:6). LETS were first developed in Canada in the 1980s, as a response to recession and unemployment. Since then this model has been very dynamic, and large networks have emerged in countries like the UK, Australia and New Zealand (Seyfang 2001b:63). Similarly, in the context of the 2008 economic crisis, LETS have regained popularity, in particular in countries heavily affected by the crisis such as Greece or Spain where they have spread rapidly. In the southern part of Spain, the landscape of community currencies has changed radically. By 2008 there was only one LETS system in Andalusia (Zoquito LETS in the province of Cadiz) and to date (June 2014) five LETS systems exists in the metropolitan area of Seville alone (Puma LETS, La Oliva LETS, El Chabir LETS, La Jara LETS and El Alcor LETS).

Map 2.1 Map of community currencies⁵ in Spain (April 2012)



Source: (Map of Community Currencies in Spain, April 2012)

Since the aim of this research paper is to study a specific LETS scheme, and acknowledging that Puma LETS practices are highly contextual, I will now draw upon Bebbington's introduction to LETS systems (Bebbington 2001) as well as Lloveras's work about Puma LETS (Lloveras 2014), in describing the general features of a LETS as well as some practical aspects of Puma LETS to help the reader to navigate through the rest of this research paper.

5

The map is a collaborative map including barter networks, time banks and CCS initiatives. (Latest update April 2012)

A LETS network is established with all its members starting with an opening balance account of zero. LETS involves the creation of a directory of goods and services where each member lists the goods and services he or she wishes to exchange, as well as those they would like to obtain. Online software called CES⁶ (Community Exchange System) is used typically by LETS as a means of facilitating exchanges among participating users and as a tool for accounting. Members have a personal account in the CES where they view their balances and can get online statements of their account. Since trust among users is fundamental in a LETS system, information about the account balances of the other members of the scheme is also available in the CES. By using CES information users contact each other directly and can start making exchanges of particular goods or services.

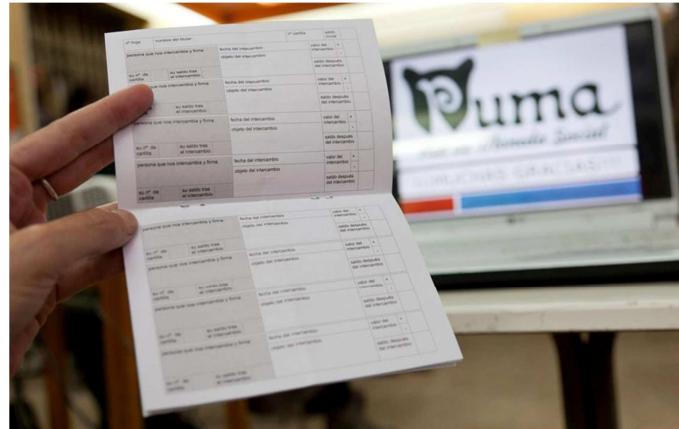
In Puma LETS, prices vary widely because during exchanges between users prices of goods and services tend to be negotiated between the parties involved. Interestingly, this creates the possibility that the value of a particular item or service may not be related to the underlying exchange rate in the regular economy. Although, as has been mentioned, prices vary in Puma LETS, in order to provide the reader with a general idea of the exchange value of the Puma currency some indicative prices from the list's offers and demands are, for example: vegetable relish can be bought for 3 Pumas, the price of a bicycle can range between 20 and 40 Pumas, and an hour's work by a web designer can be purchased for 15 Pumas.

Once a transaction is made, the transaction is recorded in a passbook (see Figure 2.1.). The account of the purchaser is credited with the amount for her or his purchase. Simultaneously, the account of the supplier is debited with exactly the same amount credited in the account of the purchaser. The sum of all accounts in the network has to be zero at any one time, although some individual balances will be negative while others will be positive. That is, system participants are either a debtor or a creditor to the LETS collectively. Importantly, this 'credit' is not issued by individual creditors but by the community.

Reflecting the emphasis on mutual reciprocity, some LETS place a flexible limit to the amount of debt that can be accumulated by users. In the case of Puma members it was agreed to place a flexible limit of (-100) Pumas to the amount of debt that can be accumulated by users. The logic is that 'debt' is an abstract claim on goods and services towards the community, rather than having any intrinsic value *per se*. In this regard LETS are not backed by any national authority (e.g. national banks); instead a network of people endorses the creation of money in the course of community-bound exchanges of goods and services, which is why they are said to be 'mutual credit systems'. In line with this argument Puma LETS promoters often emphasise that instead of speaking

of ‘debt’, they speak of ‘commitment’ towards the community, meaning that the community trusts that the members of the community will return that credit.

Figure 2.1. Puma LETS Passbook



Source: Puma Facebook

One hallmark of LETS is that, since profit accumulation is not an objective, it provides interest free credit. Two implications derive from this feature, trade among members is stimulated, because there is no benefit from saving this kind of money, and secondly members can have access of a range of goods and services by creating large deficits in their individual balance.

Another interesting feature of LETS is that exchange prices within LETS are linked to the monetary economy. In Puma LETS the value of the currency is linked to the value of the euro (one ‘Puma’ is equal in value to one euro). The main advantage of this fixing equivalency with ‘official’ money is that placing a value to goods and services is easier; in addition, local businesses can be more easily integrated into the LETS.

Finally, it is worth noticing that during the first two years of activity, Puma LETS was not only successful in attracting a large number of users (800 members) but also in terms of numbers of exchanges. Drawing upon Puma accounting information, during the first two years of activity (March 2012 – December 2013) a total of 4.643 exchanges were made and 11.515 Euros and 42.975 Pumas were exchanged.

2.2. LETS as micro-political resistance

As has been argued, LETS have not only spread around the world, but they have also attracted academics' interest for different reasons and under distinct theoretical lenses:

- **As a response to globalisation:** According to North, since the early 1990s, activists with a critical view of neoliberal economic globalisation have experimented with local money schemes as a tool for local resilience and to regain more control over economic life (North 2014:248-249). This phenomenon, sometimes termed ‘monetary

localism' (Blanc 2006), refers to monetary innovations created at the 'local level to adapt the accepted national monetary system or construct an ad hoc one' (Blanc 2002 as cited in Gomez and Helmsing 2008:2489).

- **As a response to transformation of the labour market:** In this regard, Thorne's argument is particularly interesting: according to him, LETS in the UK became popular in the 1990s as a response to labour market restructuring of paid employment which resulted in a growing gap between labour-rich and labour-poor households (Thorne 1996 as cited in Aldridge and Patterson 2002:371).
- **As a response to financial exclusion.** (Williams 1996, Pacione 1997) This theoretical approach has considered CCS a tool for empowering excluded communities, promoting economic inclusion (Lee 1996:1380). In this way a CCS is viewed as 'a vehicle for mitigating the problems resulting from unemployment and under-employment such as social exclusion, poverty and inability to participate in work' (Seyfang 2001a:989).
- **As a tool to promote sustainable development** (Lietaer 2001, North 2010, Seyfang and Longhurst 2013). According to Seyfang, analysis of the trading in one LETS in the UK reveals that they contribute to small shifts towards more environmentally friendly consumption patterns: recycling, sharing resources, re-using items, offering local products (Seyfang 2001b:63). LETS also are claimed to reduce ecological footprints through enabling more localised consumption patterns, thereby reducing energy required for transportation (Douthwaite 1996 as cited in Seyfang and Longhurst 2013).

However, while all these conceptualisations might provide good insights to explain LETS in terms of developmental tools, there are LETS that seek more 'political' goals (Lee 1996:1380). In these cases LETS are considered a form of citizen challenge that links participants with specific political claims in order to challenge, deal with and imagine alternatives to life under capitalism in everyday life (Chatterton and Pickerill 2010:475).

In the case of Puma, my argument is that members, rather than seeing a LETS as an mainstream institutional or policy innovation to promote economic development in line with Willam's arguments (Williams 1996), see it as a political tool for building a countercultural alternative space from below which operates under specific re-embedding economic and social rules. As one Puma LETS member expressed it: 'We do not like capitalism, we want to create a much fairer system that empowers us because capitalism is excluding people' (Camps 2013), [LETS] 'is a type of money made by and for the community that gives us power at a personal level and as a community allows us to make our own decisions over the thing we want to change' (Díaz. 2014). Therefore, throughout this research paper Puma LETS is conceptualised on the one hand as a struggle against specific, local power relations and on the other as a form of autonomous neighbourhood politics.

In order to provide some theoretical evidence to sustain the previous claim, I now concentrate on a strand of literature that conceptualises LETS as localised resistance to power relations ('micro-politics'). This micro-political analysis of Puma LETS would be founded firstly on a Foucauldian understanding of money as a 'local system of domination' (Foucault 1980), secondly on Scott's 'micro-political resistances' (Scott 1990) and thirdly on Pickerill and Chatterton's concept of 'autonomous geography' (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006)

Foucault considered money to be a system of domination that is 'a structuring discourse, a system of domination that operates through its own logic' (Focault 1980 as cited in North 2007:28). Because money is a system of domination, it has its own modes of power and local practices, whereby subjects construct themselves and their economic life through the money they create (North 2007:28). Taking this approach to money as systems of domination means that money is a constructed discourse that can be resisted locally. In this regard, taking Foucault's work, LETS have been conceived as so-called 'heterotopic spaces' (North 2007). In the Foucaultian sense, heterotopia refers to the coexistence of an 'impossible space' of a large number of 'fragmentary possible worlds' existing in the same space simultaneously (Harvey 1992:48). Drawing upon the notion of 'heterotopia', authors such as Chatzidakis et al. (2012:494) and Harvey (2012), have analysed the emancipatory potential of these spaces to construct more radical economic practices to the dominant capitalist order. In the case of Puma LETS this emancipatory potential is identified by its members mainly through two aspects. The first emancipatory aspect is related with capacity of Puma LETS to strengthen community ties though a more human type of economic relations 'because through Puma LETS you meet people from your neighbourhood, when you purchase an item or a service from another user within the scheme; you interact from a different set of values: trust cooperation and solidarity' (Díaz 2014). The second emancipatory aspect that has been identified is related to the strong emphasis of Puma LETS to re-localise the economy; in fact, one of the objectives of Puma LETS is to 'encourage that the wealth we create remains within the neighbourhood'.

A second set of conceptions that help us to develop ideas of micro-political resistances comes from James C. Scott's work on subaltern resistances (Scott 1990). Scott argued that every system of domination has its own ritual of subordination. For him, micro-politics are 'everyday forms of resistance' designed to resist specific forms of local domination. Thinking about a LETS in terms of 'everyday forms of resistance' is assuming that deploying a community currency is a down-to-earth, practical way to challenge this 'capitalist existence' (Gibson-Graham 2006) through day-to-day economic practices which do not re-create the dominations of capitalism. For example, Puma members place a great importance in Puma LETS as a tool that is enabling them to change daily habits such as purchasing food products 'out of the established capitalist system of supermarkets such as Mercadona, whose products are full of chemicals' (Personal interview A7). In line with this, one member pointed out that 'with Pumas you are supporting local producers and that way they can live without being exploited. The benefits do not go to someone you do not know.' (Personal interview A8).

A micro-political analysis of political action around money must engage also with the concept of autonomy in line with the reinterpretation of autonomist Marxism found in the literature (Hardt and Negri 2009, Katsiaficas 1997, Wright 2002). From this perspective ‘autonomy from the grassroots’ is the core organisational principle of LETS (Credland et al. 2003:107). LETS promoters desire for autonomy a system where ‘lives are manufactured for us, instead of being the outcome of our choices and desires’ (Credland et al. 2003:109) whereby ‘political decisions are tied to the needs of business and political elites based upon maximising material wealth’ (Chatterton 2005:545).

In this regard, drawing upon the works of Pickerill and Chatterton, this research will study Puma LETS under the analytical lens of an ‘autonomous geography’ (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006). With this concept Pickerill and Chatterton are referring to ‘those spaces where there is a questioning of the laws and social norms of society and a creative desire to constitute non-capitalist, collective forms of politics, identity, and citizenship’ (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006:730). Therefore the arguments that follow examine, Puma LETS as a collective autonomy project.

To examine the concept of autonomy it is important to understand that autonomy ranges from individual to collective autonomy. At one end of the spectrum, in modern consumer societies personal autonomy often refers to the type of autonomy that rational and self-interested individuals enjoy as consumers. At the other end of the spectrum, collective autonomy is a collective project where freedom is only achieved by building connections with others (Chatterton 2005:547). It is ‘an ethic of responsibility and reciprocity that comes through recognition that others desire and are capable of autonomy too’ (Credland et al. 2003:110). As Castoriadis and Curtis pointed out ‘I cannot be free alone’ (Castoriadis and Curtis 1991:166). Hence, ‘autonomy is only a real weapon if it is collective experience’ (Credland et al. 2003:109). This idea of collective journey is very much present in the Puma LETS; indeed, as I will discuss in Chapter 5, collective self-organisation and also the creation of synergies with other ‘autonomous geographies’ are the bedrock for the institutional praxis of Puma LETS.

Chatterton claims that collective autonomy ‘simultaneously refuses and proposes, destroys and creates’ (Chatterton 2005:547). Following this argument, on the one hand Puma LETS rejects an instituted social heteronomy (the institutions, norms and laws from distant others such as religious bodies, the family, or the state) which limit autonomy (Castoriadis and Curtis 1991 as cited in Chatterton 2005:546). On the other hand it proposes what Hardt and Negri have coined ‘creative tools of desertion, exodus and nomadism’ (Hardt and Negri 2009). For example Puma LETS’ *leit motiv*, ‘the effection is revolutionary’, which is discussed in Chapter 3, might be seen as a powerful act of refusal that urges us to imagine another society, but which is also proposing the need for mutual effects between autonomous individuals.

The working proposition of this paper is that Puma LETS is a collective journey for autonomy. The starting point is clear: it is a ‘disengagement, or desertion and exodus’ (Hardt and Negri 2009:212) from a capitalist system which, in the eyes of members, ‘serves the very specific interests of economic and political elites’ (Díaz 2014). However, the direction is unclear; as the Spanish poet Antonio Machado said in his masterpiece *Campos de Castilla*, whatever your footsteps are, ‘the road is made by walking’. The next chapters will examine the

institutional process of making and sustaining Puma LETS through a non-idealistic perspective, considering this collective journey as an ongoing process, something still ‘in the making’ that continues to grow, mature and change, where not just immediate needs of the community are met, but social relations and economic practices are redefined.

Chapter 3

Desire for collective autonomy: politics of place and addressing community needs

'Pumarejo has been a site of social struggle for nearly fifteen years. All these values of the currency are already in place, so the scope is infinite!' (Díaz 2014)

The previous statement reveals that Puma LETS is strongly path- and place-dependent. The basic concept of this chapter is the notion of 'embeddedness'. This concept was first developed by Polanyi (1944) who considered moral embeddedness of relations as the main relevant contextual feature for explaining market embeddedness. In general the concept of embeddedness refers to the idea that economic transactions cannot be fully understood unless attention is paid to the broader context in which such economic transactions occur (Lloveras, 2014:162).

In this chapter I will focus on two mechanisms for the Puma LETS that have emerged from the data collected during fieldwork. The first one is concerned with Pumajero's history of 'autonomous politics of place' (Chatterton 2005) and the second embedding element is related to the Puma LETS as a practical solution to address the needs of the community in the context of the economic recession. Both embedding elements have strongly conditioned Puma LETS to function as a micro-political tool rather than an economic developmental device.

In order to describe the embedding of these two factors, this chapter draws upon the works of Chatterton, who has explored the idea of autonomous geographies in the context of the *Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados* (MTD) in Argentina (Chatterton 2005). This author addresses the idea of autonomy in relation to three overlapping levels: the territorial, the material and the social.

3.1. Pumarejo: a traditional site of social struggle and counter power

Pumarejo is a traditionally working class area of Seville, situated within the old, northern part of the city. One of the first things that a visitor entering the Pumarejo neighbourhood would notice is that almost every street is decorated with graffiti and posters highlighting the sense of autonomy, challenging economic neoliberalism and political elites. As Lloveras points out 'Pumarejo's sense of autonomy is the result of its working class character and the rebellious footprint left by communist and anarchist groups during the 1930s that continues to transpire in the present' (Lloveras 2014:156).

Figure 3.1. Commemorative plaque stating that José Díaz Ramos, General Secretary of Communist Party was born in the Pumarejo neighbourhood



Source: Fieldwork 2014

As Lloveras (2014) suggests, after decades of abandonment during Franco's regime, the area became a pocket of crime and marginality, resulting in the stigmatisation of the neighbourhood as a dangerous area associated with homeless people, prostitution and drugs (Lloveras 2014:156).

In the late 90s, as in many historic city centres in Spain, Pumarejo became an area ripe for gentrification. The area became the target for speculative practices in the property market, forcing the expulsion of traditional working-class residents out of the area, replacing the population by another of higher income power (Rodríguez and Verdugo. 2010).

Figure 3.2 View of San Blas Street. Contrast between new and old buildings



Source: (Rodríguez and Verdugo. 2010)

During those years, long-term tenants suffered abusive tactics by landlords to force them out of the rented properties. Pumarejo *Casa* in particular, a magnificent building whose origins date back to the 18th century and which is considered the heart of Pumarejo neighbourhood, did not escape speculative practices. In 2001 the owners of the property were approached by a hotel chain purchasing 50 % of the property to open a boutique hotel (L. Hornillo.

2010:7). The rumour that the hotel firm was putting pressure upon the families to leave the property rapidly spread around the area, and the community started to organise itself to protect the building and its residents (L. Hornillo. 2010:8).

Figure 3.3. View of Pumarejo *Casa*



Source: Fieldwork 2014

In 2000 the Neighbours Association in Defence of Pumarejo Palace (NADPP)⁷ was born (Lloveras 2014:176). Under the slogan 'Pumarejo *Casa*: living patrimony', the activism of NADPP consisted of both public protest and the production of a large body of outreach work defending the heritage of the Palace in order to achieve the administrative legal protection of the building. In 2003 the building was declared BIC (a monument of great architectural and cultural interest). The BIC declaration was a major achievement for the NADPP (Lloveras 2014:175).

7

NADPP was created by a group of people ranging from political activists, environmental and pacifist groups, lawyers, academics & squatters along with some fellow, established local residents

Figure 3.4. Banner at the entrance of Pumarejo *Casa* celebrating the BIC declaration



Source: Facebook NADPP

Another turning point occurred in 2004, when the NADPP, in a public act to 'reuse, refurbish and re-habit' reopened the abandoned rooms situated on the ground floor, and the so-called '*Centro Vecinal*', (Neighbour's Hub) was opened, so that these spaces could be used for communal purposes (Lloveras 2014:181). Two years later the local government expropriated the building from the landlords arguing that the landlords were not preserving the BIC and in 2011 the use of the common spaces was transferred to the Pumarejo *Casa* Association (PCA)⁹ for a period of 15 years (L. Hornillo. 2010:9).

Figure 3.5. Local authorities transfer of Pumarejo Place use to the *Casa* Pumarejo Association



8

Centro Vecinal is an area of the Pumarejo *Casa* that was conceived as a working space for diverse CBOs associations and groups.

9

ACP is made up of CBOs associations and groups who carry out activities within the *Casa* such as: Office of Social Rights (ODS), Pumarejo library, Workshop of Italian, Sewing workshop, etc.

Source: Facebook NADPP

Despite the importance of the victories of the platform, after the expropriation of the *Casa* local residents kept on campaigning because, against existing regulations, neither the different local governments nor regional government have conducted the necessary repair works to preserve this emblematic building, using the argument that they are unable to afford the cost involved in undertaking restoration works due to the current economic crisis. Recently, the NADPP has launched a campaign of crowd-founding called '*Lo Hacemos Nosotras*¹⁰' (We the people, we will do it ourselves) with the aim of raising funds to conduct rehabilitation works.

As a result of fifteen years of autonomous neighbourhood politics against gentrification, Pumarejo community has developed 'the politics of effects' in line with Juri's concept of 'affective solidarity' (Juris 2008), standing up to the traditionally confrontational way of tackling micro-politics. This practice includes economic solidarity and care, as one of Puma informants explained, 'Puma LETS has just made visible many practices of care that were already taking place within NADPP. If someone said: this month I do not have enough money to pay for electricity, we would collect money' (Personal interview A1).

This collective sense of support is based on the idea that 'Alone we go nowhere. Affections are what keep us together' (González and Hoop 2013b). In these ways NADPP activists point out that those interpersonal relationships of affection have been vital to sustain many years of activism, building collective solidarity around the *leit motiv* 'Affection is Revolutionary'¹¹. When I asked one of NADPP activists, who is also a member of Puma LETS, about the meaning of this statement she answered,

"The affection is revolutionary, it is another way to build (...).

For me it is something else, it is to care for others, to give a hug; it is sharing with others what has happened to you, because you're a part of this community. It is a different, peaceful way, without attacking the others and this is an aspect that often confuses militants'. (Personal interview A1)

Moreover, calling for the building of a new order from the 'affections' has resulted in a different notion of citizenship within the community. At the entrance of the Pumarejo *Casa*, there is a commemorative plaque, placed when the building was reopened for communitarian use, with the following statement (see figure 3.6): 'On the 8th of May 2004, this community centre was inaugurated, holding the power of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood of El Pumarejo, for the use and enjoyment of the *cuidadanía*' (which has been trans-

10

See <http://www.lohacemosnosotras.org/>.

11

This statement was an anonymous piece of graffiti that appeared, spontaneously written on one of the front walls of the Pumarejo *Casa* a few years ago.

lated as ‘caringzenship’). The term ‘caringzenship’, according to internal documents of Puma LETS, refers to a kind of citizenship that is guided by the ethics of care which imply a conscious effort to care for each other and care for what is around them.

Figure 3.6. Commemorative plaque at the entrance of Pumarejo *Casa*



Source: Fieldwork 2014

Therefore Puma LETS might be considered a continuation of Pumajero's ‘autonomous politics of place’, in which the importance of sharing, economic solidarity and care was already in place before the economic meltdown.

3.2. Economic meltdown in 2008. Addressing community needs

Puma LETS was introduced to Pumajero at a time when Spain was undergoing processes of economic recession.

The central argument of this section is that the implementation of Puma LETS was envisaged as a practical solution to address the needs of three different groups of residents in the community, namely de-growth activists, NADPP activists and socially- excluded individuals. Each group sought to address a particular set of problems, but from there, Puma LETS has been envisioned for its members as a collective journey for autonomy from micro-political ‘everyday forms of resistance’ by creating a type of money ‘that serves to empower individuals and the community, to meet specific needs and to re-discover skills and knowledge’ (Díaz 2014)

a) De-growth Seville activists

De-growth arose as a social movement in France in 2001 (as *Décroissant*), Italy in 2004 (as *Decrescita*), and Spain in 2006 (as *Decrecimiento*) (D'Alisa et al. 2013:215). De-growth can be defined as ‘a collective and deliberative process aimed at the equitable downscaling of the overall capacity to produce and consume, and of the role of markets and commercial exchanges as a central organ-

ising principle of human lives' (Scheider et al., 2010 as cited in Sekulova et al. 2013:1).

By late 2009, a group of individuals and local groups in a specific area of Seville, launched the network 'De-growth Seville' with the objective to be a forum to connect and promote local initiatives related to de-growth social movements that were already taking place in various areas in the city of Seville ('Red Decrecimiento Sevilla' 2014). This network was based within Pumarejo *Casa* and included activists and researchers coming from broad constellations of people from different backgrounds such as agroecology, alternative medicine, food sovereignty groups, etc.

From a critical perspective, for De-growth Seville activists the crisis was not just an economic and financial crisis that had begun in 2008, but a growth-based multidimensional crisis (ecological, economic, social and political). That is to say, crisis could be traced to the prevalence of what Georgescu-Roegen termed the 'growth mania' of mainstream economics (Georgescu-Roegen 1977). In their view a type of economy that 'only serves specific political and economic interests' (Díaz 2014) was leading society into environmental and social collapse. They perceived Euro currency as 'a type of money created by private entities, embedded in values such as distrust of individuality and corruption' (Díaz 2014).

Evidence suggests that De-growth Seville did not envisage the creation of a community currency as a temporary anti-poverty patch to the current crisis. In their critique against a growth-based capitalist system, they considered that a community currency could contribute to countering the 'hegemonic capitalocentric' 'economic imaginary' (Latouche 2009), and in the end making a transition towards a 'socially-just de-growth'. This seems to be in line with Fournier's arguments about the potential of complementary currencies to foster a transition to de-growth 're-imagining economic relations, identities, activities in different terms' (Fournier 2008:529) because is a tool for 'reclaiming decisions about the organisation of economic and social activities' (Fournier 2008:535-536).

In line with these arguments one member observed:

'It is not a utopia, it is reality. It is a process that is ongoing and it will not end with the currency. It is only one step towards a necessary transition to de-growth. We understand the currency as a tool to achieve these changes, and from there this tool can also be applied to start a wider range of projects.' ('Moneda Social (II): Un Paso Más En Una Transición Necesaria' 2013)

Hence, from this perspective, Puma LETS was a practical device to materialise de-growth theory into action, as opposed to an abstract utopian aspiration in a better future, as will be explained in Chapter 5. The preceding paragraph suggests that Puma LETS was a tool that would enable the financing of other community projects. In other words, Puma LETS was not an end in itself, but a means to achieve transition to de-growth.

b) NADPP activists

Puma LETS was a practical solution to solve the problem of sustenance within the NADPP without having to use euros. In 2011, the NADPP was in the middle of an internal debate as some of the most active members raised

concerns that their involvement in the struggle to protect the Palace had become a full-time occupation (Lloveras 2014:182). In their view, their activism prevented them from securing their own livelihoods. According to a former member of NADPP, an initial solution to address this problem was that the association collected and redistributed a small, symbolic amount of euros as a way of ‘awarding’ the commitment of the most highly-involved individuals (Personal interview A1). However, there was a big internal debate whether such rewards reproduced individualistic values, betraying the centrality of values such as the voluntary character of collective action, and running the risk of turning ‘activists’ doing ‘voluntary’ work into ‘employees’ receiving a ‘salary’ (Personal interview A1). Nevertheless, other members argued that Pumarejo activism should find economic incentive mechanisms to sustain collective action. Therefore Puma LETS was a practical solution to create a kind of money created by the community that could be employed to support collective action.

c) Socially-excluded individuals

Evidence shows that, in a context of long and deep crisis in Spain community currency systems (CCS) open the door for poor households to diversify income sources to improve livelihoods and reduce vulnerability for deprived groups (Gomez and Helmsing 2008:2489). In this regard Seyfang argues that these schemes might be ‘a vehicle for mitigating the problems resulting from unemployment and under-employment.’ (Seyfang, 2001 as cited in Gomez and Helmsing 2008:2494).

Despite the fact that de-growth activists argued that the Puma LETS was more than simply a patch to recession, many local residents excluded from the labour market in the formal economy saw Puma LETS as an alternative functional device to enhance their sources of income, overcoming the social exclusionary dynamics of the formal economy. The concept of social exclusion refers to ‘a process of increasing vulnerability and precariousness that affects an increasing number of people’, including other social dimensions such as labour market precariousness, lack of stable social relations, difficulties in accessing health services, etc. (Subirats et al. 2004:12).

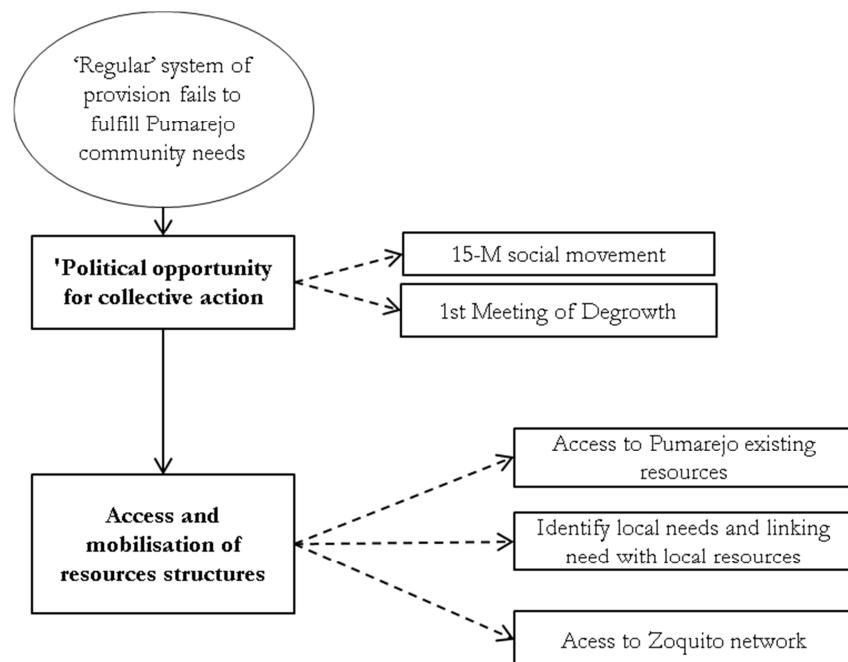
Chapter 4

Explaining the political opportunity and mobilising resources for collective action

In the previous chapter I have described Puma LETS as a scheme that is embedded at the local level by a tradition of autonomous politics of place. I have also argued that, in the context of economic meltdown of 2008, Puma LETS emerged as a result of systemic failure of ‘regular’ economy to meet the needs of the Pumarejo community.

This chapter will focus on the context surrounding the emergence of Puma LETS. The main argument being that, during May 2011, contentious claims as well as the plans and actions of the 15-M social movement, motivated degrowth activists to inaugurate a LETS within the Pumarejo neighbourhood, transforming potential for mobilisation into action. The following figure summarises the fundamental categories that will guide our analysis:

Figure 4.1. Puma LETS: political opportunity and mobilising resources for collective action



Source: compiled by author

At this point it is necessary to elaborate a brief conceptualisation of ‘urban social movements’ (Castells 1983). Castells defined ‘urban social movements’ as a type of social movement through which citizens mobilise in response to the problems in the urban environment. In this regard I am of the opinion that De-growth Seville might be considered a ‘urban social movement’ that also shares key characteristics with other social movements defined by Tarrow as ‘collective challenges based on common purposes, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities’ (Tarrow 1998:4). This definition helps us to understand two key aspects of social movements: first, their ‘sustained interac-

tion' with institutionalized politics (Meyer 1990:8) and second, the fact that they are coalitions of actors, acting upon 'common purposes'. Therefore, because building a coalition of ordinary people working together for shared purposes is not an easy task, scholars of social movements have increasingly focused on the context under which social movements originate. In this regard, the key assumption of political opportunity theorists (Eisinger 1973, Meyer 2004) is that the activist plans to advance particular claims, mobilising supporters who depend on the existence of a particular political opportunity. Tarrow and Tollefson have defined political opportunity as 'consistent but not necessarily formal or permanent dimensions of the political struggle that encourages people to engage in contentious politics' (Tarrow and Tollefson 1994:119). However, in order to exploit political opportunities, in order to engage in 'contentious collective action' (Tarrow 1998), activists should be able to recognize, gain access to and mobilise those resources that are available to them. In this regard the concept of 'mobilising structures' refers to 'those collective vehicles, informal as well as formal, through which people mobilise and engage in collective action' (McAdam et al. 1996:3). Bottom-up mobilisation involves building networks, when activists are able to attract occasional participants and gather necessary resources besides coordinating collective action (Prujt 2007:5115).

4.1. Political opportunity for collective action

'When we set up the currency we came from 15-M, which I consider is the spark that ignited many of the movements and initiatives that are emerging. Although the currency comes from the De-growth Network in Seville, if it had not been for 15-M, perhaps the currency would have had a different character.' (Díaz 2014)

The theory of this section is that, although De-growth Seville is not a pure 15-M group and was already active for two years before 15-M protests, the coincidence during May 2011 of the First Meeting of De-growth in Seville with 15-M movement protests, fostered a hope of revolutionary change and triggered de-growth activists to move from abstract theory to embark on the journey of developing a community currency within the area of Pumarejo. In this section, firstly I will address the actions that took place during the First Meeting of De-growth in Seville, and secondly I will concentrate on the 15-M movement¹².

In 2011, two years had passed since the network 'De-growth Seville' was launched. During that period, activists focused on mapping relevant needs and resources in the city in line with the principles of de-growth. Once De-growth Seville had mapped existing resources and local projects, activists thought that

it was time to connect with people and these local initiatives grew via the First Meeting of De-growth.

Figure 4.2. First Meeting of De-growth poster



Source: ('Red Decrecimiento Sevilla'2014)

The meeting took place during May 2011, and combined speeches by experts with smaller workshops to connect people and local initiatives which could contribute to carry out the social and ecological transition toward de-growth (See Fig. 4.3 and 4.4). During one of these workshops assistants specifically proposed the implementation of community currency, namely a time bank or a barter network to promote local exchanges (see Fig 4.5).

Figure 4.3. First Meeting of the De-growth Conference held in the University of Seville



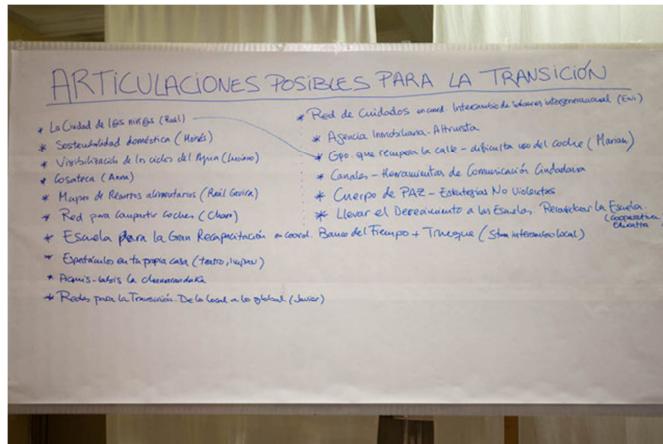
Source: (Rubio. 2011b)

Figure 4.4. First Meeting of De-growth Workshop to connect people



Source: (Rubio. 2011d)

Figure 4.5. Proposals to carry out social and ecological transition



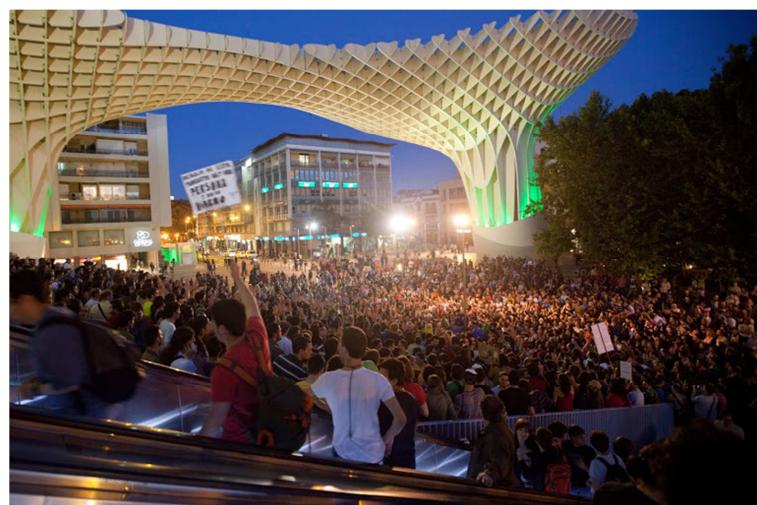
Source: (Rubio. 2011e)

Simultaneously to the First Meeting of De-growth, 15-M protests were taking place in Encarnacion Square (See Fig- 4.6), popularly known as *'Las Setas'*. The 15-M protest began on 15 May 2011, a few days before Spanish municipal elections, when thousands of citizens protested in the streets of 50 cities against corruption and a lack of real democracy. The biggest protest took place on 15 May in Madrid. After protest officially ended in Madrid, around two hundred people decided to remain in the Puerta del Sol square. On 17 May when police tried to remove them by force, messages on social media describing the police action rapidly spread through the same method. As an act of solidarity, thousands of new protesters spontaneously occupied Puerta del Sol, and this occupation of squares was replicated across Spain (Barcelona, Seville), and in other European cities by Spaniards living abroad alongside local activists (Hughes 2011:408). As the week progressed, what had begun as single act of protest gave birth to a new social movement: the so called 15-M Movement. Castells (2012) has suggested that 15-M provided a political opportunity for 'the rise of alternative economic cultures'; according to this author the crucial achievement of the so-called '15-M spirit' has been to imagine that another life is possible (Castells 2012:197). The proliferation of CCS might be considered part of this growing interest in finding alternatives to organising economic and social life outside existing institutional structures.

Although 15-M movement and De-growth Seville are different social movements, some of their proposals were closely linked, such as putting a brake on the indiscriminate growth of cities, or recovering many of the elements of rural life that are gradually being lost with the passing of time. Indeed 15-M members and De-growth Seville were ‘united by their discomfort’ for ‘doing that they don’t want to do, abiding by rules they don’t want to follow, and working at jobs they dislike’ (Perugorría and Tejerina 2013:432). This same feeling was shared by some of the members of De-growth Seville:

‘We began to talk and we realized that most of us were experiencing discomfort with our lives. Discomfort towards what was happening (...) we began to find out about de-growth.’ (Personal interview A8).

Figure 4.6. 15-M mobilisations in Encarnacion Square, Seville



Source: (Rubio. 2011a)

Figure 4.7. First Meeting of De-growth. Participants writing their proposals on a wall during 15-M mobilisations in Encarnacion Square



Source: (Rubio. 2011c)

It might be suggested that the so-called ‘spirit of 15-M’ permeated the activities of the first meeting of De-growth, motivating even more De-growth Seville activists forming the base to engage activists into collective action.

4.2. Launching Puma LETS: mobilising local resources and redefining local needs

Shortly after 15-M, collective enthusiasm and empowerment derived from the experience of 'being together', crystallised in regular meetings in which a group of approximately 20 people discussed the possibilities for launching an alternative currency scheme within the area of El Pumarejo. This group contacted Julio Gisbert, who is one of the main experts in community currencies within Spain, to conduct a workshop on community currencies within El Pumarejo *Casa*.

Puma LETS founder members make constant reference to this event as a landmark in the process of launching the currency. Drawing upon different interviews:

'After the meeting what emerged were many possibilities and there was a ton of ideas and creativity. Some people wanted to start experimenting with other economic systems, so how could we do it? Then we organised the workshop with Julio Gisbert and there, suddenly, people with great attitudes met. There was very super-spontaneous energy'. (Personal interview A8)

The workshop opened up a new range of possibilities as well as enabling attendees to acquire the basic knowledge and capacities required to start up the currency (Lloveras 2014:179). Moreover, in the course of the workshop the experience of Zoquito LETS served as a source of knowledge and provided examples to imitate, which inspired Puma LETS promoters in the process of building their own market institutions to exchange goods and services.

Of particular importance was the possibility of using the so-called '*Centro Vecinal*' (Neighbour's Hub) as a working space to carry out essential activities regarding the planning, coordination and implementation of the Puma currency scheme (Lloveras 2014:181).

Crucially, as Lloveras (2014) has argued in his work about Puma LETS, the meeting integrated, for the first time, members of De-growth Seville, the NADPP, as well as a large number of local residents. This was crucial for gaining access to communal resources existing in the area (*Ibid.*).

Puma members questioned the so-called 'scarcity' economic problem which states that human needs are unlimited and resources limited. Scholars from the orthodox tradition (Hayek 1935, Wicksell 1936) tend to assume that money plays a neutral role as a medium of exchange, eliminating inefficiencies of transaction costs from rational utility-maximiser individuals.

However, the Puma community sought to challenge this orthodox economic model under the assumption that conventional money like the euro is 'socially embedded' (Polanyi 1944). According to Lloveras (Lloveras 2014:187-189), during the first assemblies, the concerns of Puma LETS promoters did focus on the key question of mapping and linking existing local needs with available resources within the area, in ways that were consistent with de-growth principles.

Table 4.1. Identification of needs and redefinition of resources

Needs identified by the community	Redefinition of resources
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To build a network based on mutual support, reciprocity, and redistribution of resources (accommodation, nourishment, hygiene, health care, clothing, energy, education, mobility, services (e.g. household repairs), etc. 2. To promote commercial activities through networks of small producers, distributors and independent retailers (local, ecological and handcrafted products) 3. To incorporate networks of professionals that could provide relevant services to the community (e.g. legal, IT, etc) 4. To raise funding for community projects which were of interest for neighbours (e.g. repairs of <u>Pumarejo Casa</u>) 5. To prevent potential speculative practices with the new Puma currency. 6. To contribute to build a social fabric that encouraged communication and networking among neighbours (small retailers, NGOs, and associations) 7. To put in place self-sustenance mechanisms within the community that provide for those who work for 'the common good' with the means for their sustainment. 8. To preserve and encourage values and practices related to cooperation/collaboration, collective creativity, caring and mutual trust. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A redefinition of human needs in terms of community, trust, reciprocity, and mutual support. 2. A redefinition of the resources available to meet them. Challenging the view of scarcity, which they argue is artificially created, and replacing it with one of abundance. 3. A redefinition of value beyond the utilitarian logic of exchange value. The creation and exchange of value, in this context, was related to the establishment of meaningful social ties, ecology, locality, or artisan labour.

Source Compiled by author based on (Lloveras 2014:187-189)

Chapter 5

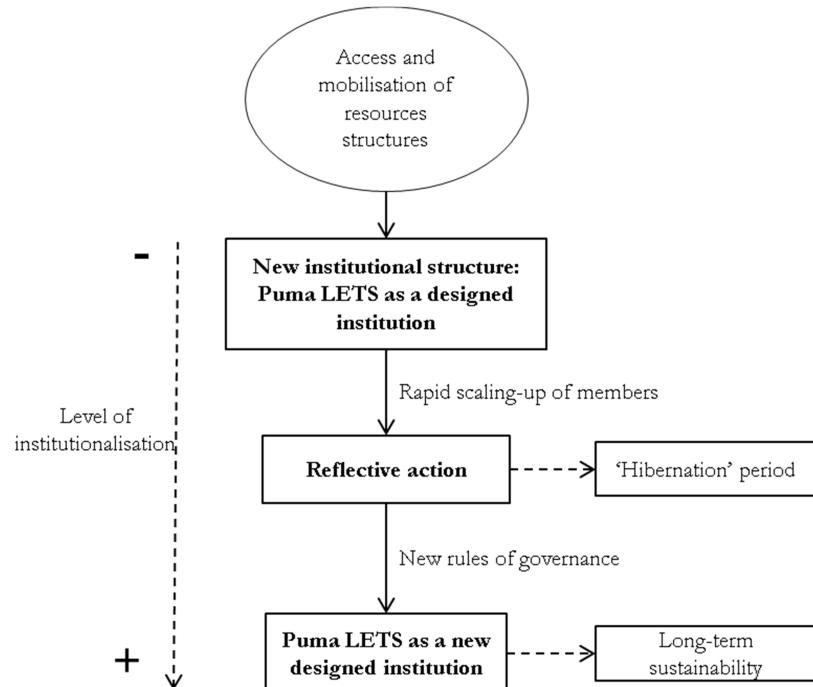
Flexible institutionalisation for long-term collective action

In the previous chapter I described the context surrounding the emergence of Puma LETS. It has been argued that to create alternatives outside an existing institutional system, in the origins of collective action, it is crucial to have access to resource structures. In this regard it has been described how the 15-M social movement motivated de-growth activists to deploy a LETS within the Pumarejo neighbourhood. However, it is worth noticing that, as Tarrow suggests, although disruptive, contentious collective action can take many forms, most of it occurs within institutions. According to him sustained interactions with 'elites, opponents and authorities' require that activists 'build organisations, elaborate ideologies and socialise and mobilise constituencies' (Tarrow 1998:8). Therefore, social movement activists might build institutions for subsequent mobilisation in order to pursue their claims over a long period of protest time (Meyer and Imig 1993, Tarrow 1998). Institutions have been defined as 'formal organisations and informal rules, compliance procedures and standard operating practices that structure the relationship between individuals in various units of the polity and the economy' (Hall 1986 as cited in Gomez 2009:13). 'Sustaining institutions is not an easy journey, activists face governance dilemmas about how to use resources to overcome institutional constraints (e.g. lack of resources, absence of mobilisation, internal conflicts, etc.) to support their actions in a long-term perspective (McCarthy and Zald 1977 as cited in Jasper 2004: 8).

The working hypothesis of this chapter is that, in the current phase of Puma LETS, new rules of governance have been introduced, accelerating in this way the process of institutionalisation within the scheme. In this case, it is argued that the challenges posed by incremental scaling up of membership made a process of deliberation necessary alongside reflective actions (Puma LETS termed this period 'the hibernation period', lasting from November 2013-July 2014). This process of reflective action resulted in a newly-designed institution that is characterised by a type of institutionalisation which combines flexibility with a high degree of formalisation, enabling the long-term self-sustainability of the scheme. Therefore, the focus of my analysis will be the main features and set of practices that make it possible to call this newly-designed institution a flexible one.

The following figure summarises the fundamental categories that will guide our analysis.

Figure 5.1. Puma LETS: institutional building towards flexible institutionalisation



Source: compiled by autor

This analysis aims to show how institutionalisation has been possible because, contrary to more radical autonomous politics forms of action, in which actions are not just a means to an end but are ends in themselves, Puma LETS promoters considered Puma LETS as one of the possible means to achieve a transition to de-growth, not an end in itself. Under this perspective, the creation of alternatives for social transformation is coming about through the existing institutional system without giving up creative counter-cultural practices (Credland et al. 2003:29).

At this point, in order to understand the dynamic followed by Puma LETS after the hibernation period, it is necessary to elaborate a brief conceptualisation of institutional economics, employing the concepts of governance, institutions and the process of institutionalisation.

In this section governance refers to ‘sustaining co-ordination and coherence among a wide variety of actors with different purposes and objectives’ (Gómez 2009:109). In line with Gómez conceptualisation of governance, governance is conceived as a process of negotiation, cooperation and alliance formation, rather than command and control. In this regard a governance system refers to a set of mechanisms for coordinating market activities, and can be defined as ‘the totality of institutional arrangements that regulate transactions inside and across the boundaries of an economic system’ (Gómez 2009:109).

With regards to this principle, the main assumption of an institutional economics scholars is that the action of economic agents is ruled and coordinated by institutions. According to this argument, Dixon has argued that marketing systems are provisioning systems embedded in institutional settings (Dixon 2002 as cited in Lloveras 2014:39). Complementing this idea, Kilbourne suggests that 'markets are dependent on 'antecedent institutions'; therefore they should be viewed as provisioning systems, which function as institutional arrangements embedded in broader institutional settings (Kilbourne, 2008 as cited in Lloveras 2014:39).

Douglas North has defined institutions as 'rules of the game in society or, more formally, as human -devised constraints which shape human interactions that structure the relationship between individuals in various units of the polity and the economy' (North 1990:3). In this regard, as institutions structure interactions between individuals, market behaviour can no longer be attributed to the rationality of utility-maximising individuals. Moreover, individual action is affected by formal institutions (e.g regulatory frameworks and systems of economic incentives) as well as informal institutions (e.g. culture, norms, or discourses). Knowledge of formal and informal institutions can be either tacit or explicit.

Therefore, the task of making economic systems compatible with degrowth principles, without having to resort to authoritarian or coercive measures, involves addressing the creation of institutional arrangements shaping market behaviour. Most fundamentally, attempts at reorganising marketing systems rests upon our capacity to intervene in the informal institutions that underlie the behaviour of economic actors (Kilbourne, 1998 as cited in Lloveras 2014:43).

Giddens (1984) in his 'theory of structuration' and (Hodgson 2004) with the term, 're-constitutive downward causation' have theorised how institutions develop in an evolutionary manner (Giddens 1984 and Hodgon 2007 as cited in Gómez 2009:14). In this regard repetitive actions become 'habits' (individual repeated actions) and 'routines' (collective repeated actions). Repeated habits and actions have been termed 'evolved institutions' (Gómez 2009:15). However, when there are completely or partially new circumstances that add uncertainty and risk, as in this case for example: a time of economic recession in which 'regular' economy fails to meet community-perceived needs, 'agents are then forced into conscious deliberation and self-reflexive reasoning' (Gómez 2009:15). In this cases 'reflection and the networks of belonging shape experimentation for new solutions' (Lane et al. 1996 as cited in Gómez 2009:15). As a response, new rules of actions may be developed, resulting in new institutions that are termed 'designed institutions' (Gómez 2009:15).

Therefore, Puma LETS could be conceptualised in terms of a new 'designed institution' that has been consciously constructed by deliberation and reflexive actions. This focus for research implies analysing Puma LETS from a

dynamic perspective, as an ongoing process, in which institutional tactics might change overtime.

During an institutional construction process, one critical aspect is whether repression or integration characterises the relations between the state and the urban social movement. (Castells and Sheridan 1977:208-209). In this regard, Pruijt points out that an urban movement has two ways of integration: co-optation or institutionalisation. Co-optation is 'the process of absorbing new elements into the leadership or policy-determining structure of an organisation as a means of averting threats to its stability or existence' (Pruijt 2003:134), while the process of institutionalisation occurs when 'a movement is channelled into a stable pattern based on formalised rules and laws' (Pruijt 2003:134). Therefore, expected behaviour becomes clearly defined; sanctions are in place. Some scholars (Castells 1983) suggest that institutionalisation takes place at the end of the life cycle of social movements because inevitably it implies a range of changed movement actions, where more routinised and less disruptive methods replace disruption (Kriesi 1995), involving as well an identity loss. Contrary to this view, other authors (Tarrow and Tollefson 1994, Membretti 2003) have argued that in contemporary social movements institutionalisation does not necessarily imply that movement is in decline. They maintain that 'flexible institutionalisation' (Pruijt 2003) is possible where the movement may only be partly integrated, while a radical wing continues to produce disruption. Therefore, it is possible to distinguish between 'terminal institutionalisation', where convention replaces disruption, and 'flexible institutionalisation', where conventional tactics complement disruptive ones. It is worthy of mention that institutionalisation is a highly contradictory process of continuous tension between a flexible and creative structure that keeps the spontaneous essences of social movement, and pressurises for a higher degree of formalisation to participate in already existing external institutions in order to legitimate their actions, thus gaining access to a wider range of resources.

5.1. Looking at how Puma LETS has overcome the 'extension dilemma' through reflective action and new rules of governance

According to Jasper, when groups expand their goals and actions become less coherent. Moreover, as their reach increases, so managerial and coordination problems arise; a phrase has been coined by scholars for this process as the 'extension dilemma' (Jasper 2004:7). Puma LETS has not escaped this fundamental dilemma, Puma LETS was born to become a 'network of confidence' (Personal interview A2); however, the rapid upwards scaling of the currency has put this objective at risk as well as future self-sustainability of the currency.

At the initial stage of the currency, the small group of people that launched Puma LETS shared a common vision and agreed rules of actions. After all, many of them shared a common past in activism. Trust and reciprocity grew among members of the Puma currency; the community was able to gain access to an increasing amount of human and material resources. Growth

was initially very gradual, mainly through word of mouth through relatives, friends and Pumarejo neighbours. During the consolidation stage, the embryonic group grew in size, the membership base grew considerably in complexity and diversity as different individuals, from different backgrounds and areas of the city, started to join the currency scheme. The promoters, who at the initial stage were confident about transferring the values and practices of Puma LETS - expressing the view that 'We're building a network of trust, and in this kind of network, it is not necessary to place restrictions, because everything flows' (González and Hoop 2012b) - a few months later were expressing their concerns about the risks of growth: 'I doubt whether we are transmitting the objectives of the currency' (González and Hoop 2013a).

Table 5.1. Chronology of Puma LETS

Initial stage: negotiation, cooperation and network formation	
Oct. 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Julio Gilbert's workshop about community currencies in Pumarejo. • First steps. Strategic decisions about the nature and objectives of the currency. • Creation of the 'steering group' driven by 20 members.
Jan. 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Puma LETS is launched as a pilot project. • A small group of members begin making exchanges. • Functioning improvements are made. • First barter market on Pumarejo Square.
March 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public presentation • 1st Mercapuma is celebrated
Consolidation of the institutional structure	
Jan. 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of members growing rapidly, and producers and local businesses become part of the currency. • New working groups are created. • High level of public exposure (conferences, radio and TV programmes, workshops, etc.). • The Supplying Centre is created (commitment to provide ecological, local and homemade food in Pumas) • Creation of the 'community care' working group.
May 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisation of the National meeting of local currencies.
Sep. 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding of external projects: Pumafunding (€/Pumas). • Deploying skills to promote new local currencies in some areas of Seville • Puma LETS reaches 800 members.
Reflecting action stage	
Nov. 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hibernation process. • New membership is closed. • Reflection over the situation of working groups. • Redefinition of 'giving back' practices. • Dynamisation group is created.
New designed institution	
Jul-Sep 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New members are accepted only if they participate and are committed to the project. • New welcoming process is introduced, placing more emphasis on trust and solidarity than practicalities of the currency. • Puma LETS renewed interest in funding external projects. • New synergies among 'new' promoters and 'original' promoters are created through collective learning.

Source: compiled by author

To manage the ‘extension dilemma’, that is, the continuous tension between the need to expand and at the same time the need to keep the original values of the currency ‘right’, new governance rules were introduced. In particular new rules have been enforced to promote higher commitment, enhance members’ mobilisation and solve internal conflicts (e.g. care practices).

5.2. Organisational structure and decision making

During the foundation stage of the currency the organisational model was based on a weekly general assembly, in which decision-making was deliberative but very spontaneous. In particular, during this stage, the currency based its operation on three aspects: horizontal personal relationships, informality and assembly democracy. As one of the senior members suggested: ‘Puma LETS is a complete horizontal organisation. It is completely open to everyone, so we do not have kings or presidents. We all command.’ (González and Hoop 2012a).

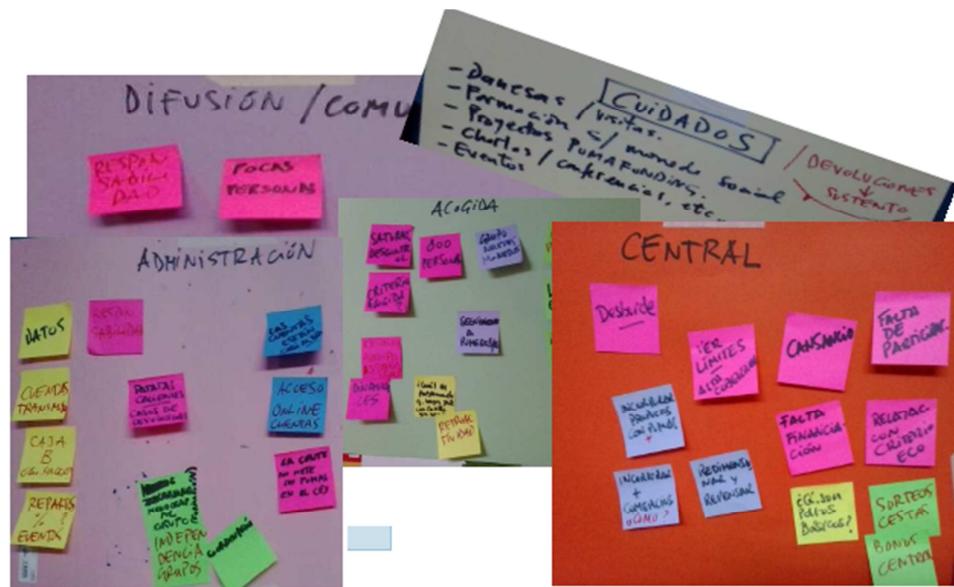
As the number of users grew, the gradual articulation of a more complex ‘descentralised’ organisational structure also became necessary. A so-called ‘Steering Group’ was established to carry out the tasks of coordination and organisation within Puma LETS. Moreover working groups were created to perform specialised tasks. Working groups functioned in a highly autonomous and self-organised manner. For example, they would hold specific meetings, set their own targets, promote specific actions. As a result of this ‘descentralised’ organisational structure, coordinating practices (e.g. general email-list, general assemblies, etc.) were deployed to ensure that all the members of the network were aware of the progress made by the different working groups. Therefore, at the initial stage, Puma LETS was balanced between maintaining individual versatility within the organisation and an internal division of labour with clear differentiation of competencies.

One crucial aspect is that, although membership was open to all members of the community, including those residents with more income-generation motivations (e.g. those excluded from the labour market), organisational tasks were mainly carried out by the original group of promoters who had set up the currency in 2012.

However, by September 2013, a group of members of the Steering group began to voice their concerns that the ideas and practices underpinning the Puma LETS were not being subjected to enough critical scrutiny. As was stated in an internal document, ‘often inertia and creative improvisation has moved us forward without really knowing where or why’ (González and Hoop 2013a). In addition, ‘burn out’ feelings came about as a consequence of the high level of workload associated with their participation in collective action. By November

2013, members had made a start on a process of reflective action that Puma LETS members termed a 'hibernation process'. During this process the first task was to map out the situation of each working group.

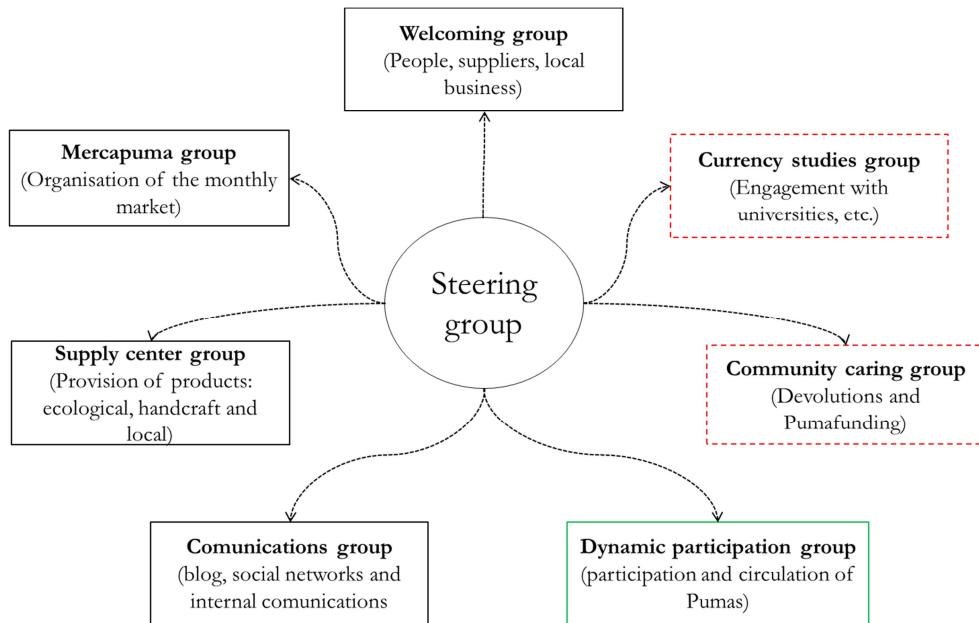
Figure 5.2. Hibernation process. Post-it notes showing the situation of working groups.



Source: Internal documents

During the current phase, at an inner organisational level, a new organisational structure has emerged in which new working groups have been created (e.g. dynamic participation group); other have readapted their tasks (e.g. welcoming group) and two of them have been eliminated (e.g. currency studies group and community caring group). The following illustration provides an idea of the working group that functioned during 2013 and the groups that to date (September 2014) are still functioning.

Figure 5.3. Working groups in Puma LETS¹³



Source: compiled by author

The current phase is characterised on the one hand by a network-like, flexible structure with a high degree of fragmentation and, on the other hand, a high level of institutionalisation.

Regarding flexibility, decision-making processes take place largely in working group assemblies and general assemblies are not very frequent (one a month). The Steering Group remains a highly informal structure, whose members come in and out or temporarily adjust their levels of involvement, thus facilitating personal autonomy. A new member of the Steering group expressed it in this way: 'Self-organisation makes you free to get involved to fill the space you desire, and other people leave. If someone wants to gradually disengage, then we will gradually take on more responsibility' (Personal interview A7). This is possible because new members are joining the working groups. During this process older promoters acknowledged the importance of spending time teaching their skills so that new members can take over certain working groups. However some difficulties are arising regarding certain specialised tasks such as the administrative management of the scheme (Personal interview A2). Nevertheless, during the interviews, longer-standing promoters pointed out the positive synergies that new members were bringing in terms of collective learning (Personal interview A2).

In relation to the organisation's formalisation, although working groups are very autonomous and present different levels of formalisation, participant observation suggests that the currency has overall a high degree of institutionalisation. For example, Puma LETS has developed a formal micro-funding system called 'Puma Funding' to deal with the funding of external projects¹⁴ that are of interest to the community. According to internal documents, the process includes a formal procedure to evaluate the acceptance of a project proposal.

5.3. Social cohesion and external networks

Scholars have argued that the success of collective action depends on the degree of social cohesion (Oliver, Marwell and Teixeira 1985 as cited in Moody and White 2003:105). In this sense, for the purpose of analysis, cohesion is defined as a 'field of forces that act on members to remain in a group' (Festinger, Schachter and Back 1950 as cited in Moody and White 2003:112). Here, I will focus on the literature strand of social cohesion which views group dynamics as social networks. According to this perspective, more than the characteristics of the group *per se* (e.g. size), the crucial element, explaining how a collection of individuals are united, is the kind of social ties that exist among individuals. According to Bollen and Hole 'perceived cohesion' of individuals is an important element in characterising the cohesion of a group (Bollen and Hole 1990 as cited in Moody and White 2003:107). However, Moody and White (2003), differentiate between the 'perceived cohesion' that members manifest and the 'relational togetherness' of a group. 'Relational togetherness' refers to the relational paths by which groups members are linked (Moody and White 2003 as cited Bruhn 2009:30). Under this perspective a group is structurally cohesive when multiple independent paths are developed, that link actors together. In other words, the presence of multiple ties among actors increases the chances of sustainability, since if one actor is removed alternative links among members exist (Bruhn 2009:42).

In this regard, part of the 'extension dilemma' (Jasper 2004:7) is whether a LETS chooses to put more emphasis on enhancing the level of 'structural cohesion' by promoting multiple relational paths among members or, conversely, a LETS prefers an 'outward looking strategy' in order to diversify the supply of goods and services but at the cost of weaker relational paths among members. Evidence suggests that Puma LETS has produced an intermediate solution. In this case 'flexible institutionalisation' is enabling Puma promoters to work on both sides of the equation.

Regarding the strategic choice of ‘outward’ looking, activists had, from the initial stages, a conscious interest in reaching out to ‘ordinary people’ from the Pumarejo neighbourhood. A central feature of Puma LETS was that it opened up the possibility of broadening the range of tactics so that ‘ordinary people’ could engage more broadly in anti-capitalist practices in their daily lives, and the economy could ‘serve the immediate needs of the community’ (Díaz 2014). In fact membership was completely open, and everyone with time or skills could participate, even if they came from other areas of Seville. Inclusivity to reach out to broader groups is reflected in the holding of welcoming sessions, the use of Facebook and Twitter and a monthly radio programme.

This desire to create an open, inclusive community-managed LETS seems in contradiction to the strategy followed after the hibernation period, of ‘rescaling’ the currency by restricting membership and rethinking the rules and practices of the ‘welcoming’ process to new members. In particular, in its current stage, it is argued that Puma is putting stronger emphasis on enhancing the level of ‘structural cohesion’. To date, membership is bound by commitment to participate in some degree in the organisational functions that maintain the scheme, and at the same time greater importance is placed on transmitting the values of Puma LETS.

Moreover, even though the central objective of Puma LETS was to provide healthy and affordable food for the community, those who joined the currency looking for affordable food and a source of income in the light of the recession were often viewed as opportunistic and not understanding of the ‘true’ values of the currency around de-growth discourses. As one of the local producers expressed it

‘Most people who only last a short period in the currency do so because they are only interested in generating euros. If they are not able to generate enough euros, they are not interested in getting involved in the network. For me this beneficial because it creates a better environment, it creates a community.’(Personal interview A7)

Observations during fieldwork suggest that desire to create a more exclusive space to maintain the countercultural essence of the currency is turning Puma LETS into a relatively closed ‘activist hub’ with homogenous class, race and cultural identities (middle class, white, sub-cultural). It is argued that while this strategy might make them more sustainable over a longer timeframe, it also reduces the dynamism and diversity of people involved, and is failing to engage with people in their everyday lives. A member expressed this concern: ‘Sometimes I doubt that the reality of the Pumarejo *Casa* is the reality of the neighbourhood. (...) I have many colleagues who live here and who still see this building as something odd.’ (Personal interview A2).

Moreover, over time Puma LETS has developed a micro-funding system termed ‘Puma Funding’ to fund external activities or projects of value for the community. This might be considered as a step further to get involved in a

wider range of de-growth goals (e.g. Sevilla Guifi project¹⁵). Funding external projects is favouring positive externalities, allowing a considerable circulation of cognitive resources and knowledge from outside, creating new arenas for experimentation. Crucially, Puma LETS has strong concerns over achieving project goals and achieving financial and non-positives returns (e.g. access to new knowledge) to the currency scheme. This, paradoxically, has turned Puma LETS into a less liberalising and more project-oriented type of activism, in line with Mayer's arguments (2003) which suggest that 'activist projects often become cornered by modes of neoliberal governance' (Mayer, 2003 as cited in Chatterton and Pickerill 2010:487).

Another key 'outward' looking strategy has been an explicit attempt to engage with others in a non-confrontational manner, including more traditional and hierarchically-organised actors. The Puma community has managed to engage with a range of actors at different geographical scales (among others community currencies, mass media, academic institutions, environmental groups, NGOs, ecological producers networks, etc.). Puma LETS promoters see making connections beyond the locale and the building of solidarity with other groups as spaces that enable reflection and the incubation of new ideas, as well as supporting resistance to the growing enclosure and precariousness of everyday life. For example, through the organisation of the National Meeting of Community Currencies in May 2013, Puma LETS connected with scholars working in national and international universities as well as with other national community currencies.

Figure 5.4. II National Meeting of Community Currencies celebrated in El Pumarejo (May 2013)



Source: (Yasuyuki. 2013)

The aim of this initiative is to create a self-managed network of communications. Puma LETS collaborates with this initiative, financing infrastructure and providing a network of potential users. For more information see: <http://monedasocialpuma.wordpress.com/2014/07/10/nace-sevilla-guifi-net/>

With regards to engagement with institutional politics, from its early stages Puma LETS preferred to be living alternatives to neoliberalism by practising, as much as possible, their politics in the everyday. However, during this recent stage, a new set of perspectives for co-optation has emerged for Puma LETS because two new, progressive political parties, '*Podemos*' and '*Ganemos*', are becoming relevant in the local political arena. In connection with this, some members of the Puma Steering Group have built new political potentials and alliances with these political parties. For example, one has asked for permission to hold an assembly of the *Podemos* political party within the Pumarejo *Casa*. Due to time constraints, it has not been possible during the fieldwork, to assess the degree of general acceptance of *Podemos* and *Ganemos* views within the scheme, so it is not possible to assess whether, in the future, Puma LETS members could be open to be included in mainstream policy processes (e.g. urban planning) as a legitimate participant.

To summarise, Puma LETS flexible institutionalisation is reflecting on a strong emphasis on cohesion and exclusivity with the aim of maintaining the autonomous character and countercultural values within Puma LETS, which is not seen as contradictory to active involvement and interaction with both mainstream and countercultural organisations that operate at outside the boundaries of the currency. It is been argued that on the one hand this is favouring renewal and adaptation to the environment enhancing long-term collective action, but on the other it is also reducing the dynamism and diversity of people involved within the boundaries of the currency.

In the following sections two concrete practices of Puma LETS will be examined to illustrate how the scheme is characterised in the current phase by two opposing tendencies: On the one hand 'caring practices' in section 5.3 will illustrate a tendency toward to flexibility, and on the other in section 5.4 Supplying Center working group practices represent a tendency toward a higher degree of institutionalisation. type of governance system.

5.3. 'Caring practices': towards a higher degree of flexibility

In collective action projects, motivation is vital for sustaining activism and energy. Ryan and Deci distinguished between intrinsic (internal) motivation and extrinsic (external) motivation. Intrinsic motivation is driven by an interest or enjoyment in the task itself, while extrinsic motivation refers to the external elements from outside of the individual to perform better (Ryan and Deci 2000:55); examples are rewards (for example, money or grades) or the threat of punishment to comply with established performance levels (e.g. getting fired). In collective action intrinsic motivation tends to be high since activists find it meaningful to work towards achieving their goals. However, intrinsic motivation is not enough to maintain commitment of the members in the long term. Unless activists find extrinsic motivational mechanisms to provide for those members that sustain the communitarian processes, collective action projects

run the risk of draining the energy of those individuals that work for the common structures.

At the present phase of Puma it is possible to distinguish two types of caring practices: formalised caring practices and spontaneous caring practices. The first set of practices refers to those formalised practices through which Pumas are used as a monetary, extrinsic motivational mechanism for making the work carried out by individuals to enhance the wellbeing of the community visible and rewarding. The second set of practices refers to those symbolic actions that reward members or enhance the wellbeing of the community in symbolic or emotional ways.

The main argument of this section is that, despite the efforts in creating formal caring practices, Puma LETS members are relying mainly on spontaneous caring practices. The working hypothesis is that ‘caring practices’ present a tendency towards a higher level of flexibility, because in line with the conception of social cohesion developed by Moody and White (2003) (see section 5.3), spontaneous caring practices are functioning as a mechanism for social cohesion. They are promoting ‘affective solidarity’ (Juris 2008:65) and collective support among members (e.g donations, gifts, creating physical places for support, etc.), creating multiple relational paths amongst Puma members.

Making work carried out by individuals to enhance the wellbeing of the community visible and rewarding was a crucial concern for NADPP activists. During the consolidation phase Puma members agreed to create a formal mechanism, so that people involved in organisational tasks could receive a symbolic monetary amount of Pumas in compensation for their voluntary work (the so-called ‘devoluciones del común’ or ‘giving back process’ in English).

During the initial period, the ‘give back’ process consisted in encouraging Puma members to fill in a self-evaluation form about his or her contribution to community care in the previous six months. To avoid misunderstandings members were asked to rate such contributions according to three levels¹⁶:

- Sporadic: 20 Pumas per six-month period
- Intermittent: 50 Pumas per six-month period
- Continuous: 100 Pumas per six-month period

However, due to internal disagreements and the perception among members that the system was unable to reflect well enough the amount of work

done for the community during the hibernation period, a new 'giving back' process was agreed among members. To meet this objective, from January 2014, instead of being an individual self-evaluation, each working group should make a collective reflection and decide about the rewards of their members. Paradoxically, during the fieldwork of July 2014, only the Supplying Centre working group had carried out this collective reflection about devolutions. In other words, despite the great emphasis of Puma LETS in creating formal mechanisms for making visible work for the community, this process was not been followed by most Puma members. When I questioned one of the members about this matter, she responded:

'I think the people experienced it in a contradictory way. There are those who want to place a value on everything, because otherwise those works for the community become invisible or undervalued, and those who feel that it means placing a monetary value on everything. They think, if I want to do something for this person, why do I have to place a figure on that?' (Personal interview 8)

Participant observation and interviews with volunteers reveal that spontaneous caring practices in the form of non-formalised acts of solidarity are preferred by the members rather than a formalised 'give back' process:

'The other day, one of the members brought me a dress that she wanted to get fixed. I did not have any obligation (...). For me, fixing her the dress is a symbolic reward in return to the work she is doing for the community'. (Personal interview A1).

Figure 5.5. Handmade chef's hat as a symbol of the giving back process to 'pay' for rehabilitation work in the kitchen



Source: Fieldwork 2014

Figure 5.6. 'Donation'¹⁷ made by one member to the Supplying Centre



Source: Fieldwork 2014

Informal 'caring' practices also include social time and physical places for support. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the space called '*Taller de costura*'. This 'sewing workshop' takes place on Thursday afternoons, and the original objective was to provide company and emotional support to one of the old residents who still lives in Pumarejo *Casa*. Gradually this space has been transformed into collective custom, where members meet in a room called '*Bajo 5*' and bring coffee and biscuits to share with other members. This space is non-hierarchical, in which activists express how they are feeling on that day, share inter-generational wisdom, remember past collective actions or seek counselling.

Figure 5.7. *Taller de Costura* (Sewing Workshop) in Pumarejo *Casa*



Source: Fieldwork 2014

Moreover, Puma LETS members have a sophisticated understanding of emotions that has been developed in workshops organised by Puma LETS members where participants work on their emotional reflexivity; through discussions exploring the cementing emotions, such as violence, fear or shame. For example, Garapa Space, which is a therapeutic space founded by two social entrepreneur members of Puma LETS, organised a workshop on 'self-esteem and self-defence', where Puma LETS members posed questions such as: How do you feel about violence?

Figure 5.8. Self-esteem and self-defence workshops in Garapa Space



Source: Fieldwork 2014

To sum up, Puma LETS has developed formalised caring practices, structured however in parallel with spontaneous caring practices which are a crucial part of social relations within the community, because these sets of practices are part of the set of rules of the community and provide a kind of social cohesion, which is derived from individual agencies, as well as emotional bonds and closeness amongst group members.

5.4. Supplying Centre working group: towards a higher degree of institutionalisation

As has been suggested, on the current stage of it the major characteristic of Puma LETS is the continuous tension between the need for structure and the need for flexibility. The main argument of this section is that the Supplying Centre working group is gradually moving towards a higher degree of institutionalisation to manage its resources.

One of the crucial choices made by Puma LETS is the creation of *Central de Abastecimiento* (Supplying Centre in English). The Supplying Centre is organised by the Supplying Centre working group, every Monday from 7 p.m to 9 p.m in the so-called *Centro Vecinal* (Neighbour's Hub) within Pumarejo Casa. The main objective of the Supplying Centre is to open the possibility to Puma

members of acquiring greener, more ethical and locally produced products with their Pumas which other members are unable to produce or exchange within the network on an individual basis. In this event purchases are limited to members of the Puma network. The Supplying Centre has contributed to overcoming two of the traditional constraints of LETS schemes, namely monetary pressures of economic self-sufficiency and small scale.

Figure 5.9. Groceries in the Supplying Centre



Source: Fieldwork 2014

Figure 5.10. Keeping records in the Supplying Centre



Source: Fieldwork 2014

In relation to overcoming the real limits set by the scale, Puma LETS has not limited itself, as have the rest of the existing LETS systems in Seville, to trading only through a local directory of 'wants' and 'offers'. Since the early stages of the scheme, Puma LETS promoters understood that to enable members to survive at the local scale through non-capitalist exchange, it was necessary to build linkages with local producers or green retailers. As a result, the Supplying Centre has created a substantial, green local network of local producers, with ecological values similar to that of the de-growth activists (e.g. urban agriculture, food cooperatives, green businesses, etc.).

The Supplying Centre has gone through a process of organisational consolidation that represents a particular model for the organisation of resources.

The process has been as follows:

Table 5.2. Supplying Centre organisational consolidation

Phase	Organisational consolidation
Initial stage: Pilot project (March 2011-June 2012)	<p>During the early stages of Puma LETS, there was an interest in purchasing food products from local producers. From March 2011 to June 2012, there were various collective purchases that were highly informal and ad hoc, according to the interest of Puma members. By the end of 2012, due to the success of this pilot project, Puma members embarked on the journey of institutionalising the Supplying Centre permanently. They considered the possibility of selling the products in three local businesses but, due to legal constraints, promoters decided to open the Supplying Centre once a week within Pumarejo Casa, so that the Supplying Centre could become a meeting point for consumers and local producers. They began acquiring non-perishable products such as rice, oil and flour, and then expanded it to perishable products.</p>
Consolidation: Financial self-sustainability risk (Jan. 2013- Sep 2013)	<p>Regarding financial self-sustainability, in order to be able to buy products, the Supplying Centre needed to have euros that, in the beginning, were mainly acquired through Mercapuma (the monthly market of the currency). So when Puma LETS membership grew considerably, the Supplying Centre, faced financial sustainability difficulties because Mercapuma could not expand further, due to size constraints.</p>
Reflecting action stage: new governance rules (Nov 2013- Jul. 2014)	<p>During the hibernation period the implementation of new governance rules was agreed to ensure long-term financial sustainability of the Supplying Centre (Source: Puma LETS internal documents):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 50% of the revenues of Mercapuma were allocated to the Supplying Centre 2. Voluntary donations from consumers of at least 10% of purchases were in euros 3. Selling of tickets to participate in the raffle of a basket with products of the Supplying Centre 4. Producers could sell their product directly to consumers (accepting a minimum of 30% of payments in Pumas).

Source: compiled by author

Crucially the highest point reached so far in the balance between flexibility and institutionalisation is the question of financial self-sustainability. In this sense, during the general assembly that took place on June 2014, some members raised the question of formalising the legal form of Puma LETS into an

‘integral cooperative’, similarly to what had been done recently with community currency in Granada. A further dialectic element comes in the form of the possibility raised by some members, of applying for subsidies to alleviate Supplying Centre pressures to earn euros. Paradoxically, both ideas seem to contradict the original countercultural autonomous character of Puma LETS.

Supplying Centre has introduced its own routines for making decisions, coordinating and managing its resources that, through repetition, have become increasingly institutionalised. This process of institutionalisation is strongly linked to the reflexive capabilities developed by members, to give periodic criticism in a process of continuous re-evaluation and adaptation to the changes: ‘It is an open project where nothing is fixed, new ideas are introduced and everything is open to change’ (Personal interview A2).

Table 5.3 clearly reflects that the development of new routines is related to two main elements at different scales:

- At the inner level, concern with improving organisational and human resources efficiency. It is moving in the direction of a stronger internal division of labour, a clearer differentiation of competencies, aiming to develop its own capabilities with considerable autonomy within Puma LETS.
- At ground level, attracting new political and financial resources, to sustain resources in a long-term perspective by creating new links with a broader range of political and economic actors.

Table 5.3. Towards a higher degree of institutionalisation for managing resources

Resources for social change		Practices towards a higher degree of institutionalisation
Human resources	Seven people work regularly in the Supplying Centre; although they are volunteers, they receive monetary compensation through the 'giving back process' (see section 5.3).	Formalised giving back process'
	Social composition varies with respect to skills and expertise, with a mix of longer-term members with a high level of specialisation and new members. In this sense, this working group has planned to provide formalised training to new members, incorporated into this working group so they can take over more specialised tasks.	Formalised training to new members within the working group
Organisational resources	This working group enjoys a high level of autonomy within Puma LETS and it has developed its own norms and rules.	Norms and rules
	Each member carries out permanent tasks such as planning the quantities of products that are going to be acquired, keeping records of sales, keeping financial control or contacting producers and retailers	High internal division of labour
Financial resources	Members of this working group have stated that it is not necessary for them to participate in the general assembly because they already meet every Monday and Wednesday. Their high level of autonomy is also expressed in their desire to manage the use of their own channels of communication (Facebook and Web) without relying on the Communication working group.	Independent communication channels and decision-making procedures
	Some members raised the question of formalising a legal form of Puma LETS	Formalising the legal form of Puma LETS, and applying for subsidies
Political resources	The Supplying Centre is also considering integrating mainstream businesses. Since promoters acknowledge that the lack of mainstream businesses restricts the possibilities of creating a more human and less commoditised local economy.	Consolidation and intensification of relations with mainstream businesses
	The Supplying Centre has always been connected to a milieu of ecological political movements to fight against growth-based type of consumption	Puma LETS has applied for and is using a City Hall Community Garden

Source: compiled by author

Chapter 6

Conclusions

I began this research paper with a metaphor describing how the rules of two board games illustrate two types of money. On the one hand, '*Pale'* game acted as a metaphor of the rules of conventional national currencies within the dominant capitalist system in Spain before 2008 crisis that promote competition, individual accumulation and money scarcity. On the other, '*The Landlord's Game*' was a metaphor to describe a type of money created by some communities as an island of cooperation in the middle of the financial crisis.

The global crisis in Spain represented a moment of disruption at different levels, in this context new collective actors were formed within civil society and through massive mobilisations demanded authorities the introduction of the corresponding changes in order to address immediate socio-economic needs (e.g 15-M social movement). In addition, there were also some local communities who envisaged the crisis as opportunity to build new alternatives to reorganize economic life transcending conventional currencies, and individualistic rationale, Puma LETS was among them.

The research studied CCS from a micro-political resistance perspective to see how members questioned the dominant model imposed by mainstream economy. The research also studied the place and path dependency of the scheme, as well as the triggering factors that motivated de-growth activists to get involved in the task of deploying a community currency within the Pumarejo area. In this research I have also explored the current rules of governance. The final part has described the main economic and social development outcomes within the Pumajero neighbourhood.

This study argues that Puma LETS was more than simply a temporary patch on the hardships of recession; Puma LETS promoters envisaged community currency as an emancipatory micro-political tool of resistance to reinvent their economic practices in more autonomous, humane and ecological ways, in line with previous research by North in Manchester (North, 2007). The present work also argues that context-specific embedding elements have played a crucial role in developing objectives and specific institutional practices within the currency. More specifically, this study argued that collective action works when the political environment and resources are conducive to community mobilisation. It is also being argued that 'flexible institutionalisation' is contributing to long term sustenance of the scheme. Finally, it has been suggested that Puma LETS is contributing to the main benefits going to the most committed members rather than residents in the area with more income generation needs.

Ethnographic methodology has been the pillar of this research paper. Spending time with participants and participating in Puma LETS activities before conducting ethnographic interviews with key informants proved to be critical in gathering relevant data during interviews. Another relevant aspect is that using photography has enabled me to illuminate abstract notions such as 'care', 'affection' or 'autonomy'. In addition being included in the Puma e-mail

list was useful to collect data on internal conflicts among members that otherwise would have been very difficult to gather.

Answering the main question of this study, Puma LETS promoters understood Puma LETS to be a tool for the micro-politics of resistance to the capitalist model dominant in Spain in ways that emphasised collective autonomy. Desire for autonomy was envisaged by Puma members through day-to-day economic practices which made their resistance more feasible and accessible to ordinary people, enhancing the chances to create new synergies in the community and reclaiming control over the local economy. Moreover, autonomy in this context is a very goal and project oriented project, which place value to see a return on emotions and time invested, seeking to build networks with both countercultural as well as mainstream institutions. Puma LETS is also functioning as an alternative micro-financial tool through which civil society can formulate and carry out its own projects achieving a wider range of goals to benefit the community. What derives from this is that Puma LETS envisaged a more complex form of doing politics that is not simply challenging but simultaneously 'against and 'in' capitalism.

Another interesting finding is that, after fifteen years, the Pumarejo community has developed a type of non-confrontational way of facing up to micro-politics through 'politics of effects'. This way of understanding micro-politics through member's solidarity and mutual aid has also permeated the activities of Puma LETS in their refusing the capitalist model dominant in Spain. In line with this argument, 'Affective solidarity' (Juris 2008) has been identified as the element that convinces Puma members to remain in group. Effects are also creating new relational paths among members and these are also perceived by members as an essential element both for their emotional sustainability as well as identity element of the currency.

Finally, it is worthwhile to notice that promoters considered Puma LETS not an end in itself but just one of the possible means of achieving a more liberated future. Therefore engaging with a group of actors within the existing institutional system it is not seen as a betrayal of the 'here and now' of autonomy, but as a means to overcome two of the traditional constraints of LETS, namely limits to gaining access to resources, and monetary pressures of economic self-sufficiency.

Previous scholarship (Gomez and Helmsing 2008; Seyfang, 2001) has reinforced the idea that in circumstances of a long recession, similar to that which Spain went through in 2011, community currencies emerge as a way of mitigating the hardships of economic crisis. However, with this research it has been demonstrated that in circumstances of economic crisis, the use of other forms of money responds to political goals as well. In this case the great majority of Puma promoters were middle income activists and local residents whose needs were not directly linked to money scarcity but to creating a practical device to build a more human and green space for social life, as well as building alternative livelihood strategies.

Regarding the limitations of the research, it is possible that engaging with a more diverse group of members could have led to stronger conclusions to support the findings. In addition, qualitative data collection could have been complemented with a quantitative approach to further discussion about the

outcomes of the currency in terms of local development. In this sense it would have been very interesting to collect quantitative data from the CES system.

This research opens doors for further research on the concept of 'flexible institutionalisation'. This concept reflects that both disruption and integration characterise the relations between the state and radical grassroots initiatives. Puma LETS seems to conform to this pattern, offering a wide range of possibilities in pursuit of political goals. It also provides an opportunity for further research about ways to practice and sustain activism through emotional reflexivity.

Finally, the evolution of Puma LETS illustrates the difficulties of creating an economic institution from below within the regular economy. In grassroots initiatives, players cannot rely on fixed rules, and the task of making economic systems and defining the rules of the game is an institutional process of negotiation among actors with different purposes and objectives. Even 'in the making' Puma LETS was and still is an ongoing process, in which institutional tactics change overtime. During this process Puma members continue experimenting with new rules confronting challenges, tensions and even contradictions to change social and economic life into one with different kinds of values.

Appendix

Appendix 1 Interviewees' demographic characteristics

Interview number	Interviewee gender	Involved mainly with
A1	Female	Steering group/Administration
A2	Female	Steering group/Supplying Centre
A3	Female	Steering group/Caring practices
A4	Male	Steering group/Welcoming
A5	Female	Local producer/health
A6	Male	Local producer /food
A7	Male	Local producer/food
A8	Female	Local producer/food

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