

# THE REJECTIONIST ETHIC AND THE SPIRIT OF THE GREEN ECONOMY

## THE WESTERN ZEITGEIST, THE CROATIAN CONTEXT, AND GREEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

NIKOLA PETROVIĆ, LANA PETERNEL AND BRANKO ANČIĆ

*This article explores how particular layers of the Western Zeitgeist and the Croatian social and economic context influenced the emergence and development of green entrepreneurship, and whether they could be helpful in understanding the potential transition to a green economy. It is argued that what initially drove several of interviewees to green entrepreneurships could be subsumed under the label rejectionist ethic used here to encompass different modes of rejecting modern economic institutions and the usual life trajectory of completing one's education and working at a job in line with one's social position and/or education.*  
Keywords: green entrepreneurship, Croatia, Yugoslavia, rejectionist ethic, countercultural values, self-fulfillment, Protestant ethic

*Članek predstavi, kako so različne ravni zahodnega zeitgeista in hrvaškega družbenega in gospodarskega konteksta vplivale na nastanek in razvoj zelenega podjetništva. Ob tem ugotavlja, ali bi lahko bile te ravni koristne za razumevanje širšega prehoda v zeleno gospodarstvo. Prispevek razloži, da je tisto, kar je sprva pripeljalo več sogovornikov do zelenega podjetništva, zajeto v izrazu zavrnitvena etika. Z njim avtorji opišejo različne načine zavračanja sodobnih ekonomskih institucij in običajnih življenjskih poti, pri katerih izobraževanju sledi angažma na delovnem mestu, ki je skladno z družbenim položajem oziroma izobrazbo.*  
Ključne besede: zeleno podjetništvo, Hrvaška, Jugoslavija, zavrnitvena etika, prokulturne vrednote, samoizpolnitev, protestantska etika

“Man is dominated by the making of money, by acquisition as the ultimate purpose of his life. Economic acquisition is no longer subordinated to man as the means for the satisfaction of his material needs.”

– Max Weber (1920: 18)

“Nobody can get rich doing that, but you can make an average living. A big advantage is that you're your own boss, that nobody harasses you, that there is no mobbing. A second big advantage is that you're doing something healthy. You're pretty much always in healthy air, outdoors, no stress, in a clean environment.”

– Croatian green entrepreneur on organic farming

### INTRODUCTION

Ever since Max Weber's seminal work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, debates regarding how much specific Protestant values contributed to the development of capitalism have been fierce and remained unresolved (see Swatos and Kaelber 2016). However, recent research has argued that some Calvinist values were conducive to its development (Kaelber 2016). Weber stated that the combination of capitalist entrepreneurs seeing their work as a

calling and “the strict avoidance of all spontaneous enjoyment of life” led to a profit surplus and the rise of the capitalist economy (1920: 18). The question that came up during this study of pioneering green entrepreneurs in Croatia was whether some set of values—apart from the obvious set of environmental values—within post-industrial Western capitalism could be conducive to the proliferation of green entrepreneurs and consequently contribute to the rise of a green economy.

David Pearce et al. apparently coined the term *green economy* in their *Blueprint for a Green Economy* (1989). Although they did not define the green economy concept, they did focus on the topics and issues connected with the term *sustainable development*, while denoting the green economy as an economy that has the potential to replicate itself in sustainable ways. Regardless of the lack of definition of the concept in the book, in his later work Pearce emphasized green economy outcomes in terms of non-declining human wellbeing and use of natural resources in sustainable manner, subsuming three basic features of a green economy derived from the desired outcomes: a) constraining human greed, b) sustainability, and c) decoupling. With regard to the first feature, the author criticized the notion of *homo economicus* and re-evaluated this economic actor as a person that could be less greedy and whose economic motivation could consist of non-selfish matters of interest. The second feature implied a sustainable, self-replicating economy, whereas the third feature assumes the “systematic decoupling of rates of change in economic output and the environmental assets used up in that process” (Pearce 1992: 4). Pearce et al. (1989) focused on three key policy areas important to achieve greener economy: valuing the environment, accounting for the environment and creating incentives for environmental improvement.

Although the first attempts to conceptualize the green economy as a new socioeconomic concept that tackles environmental and economic problems were made in the early 1990s, the green economy was not brought to the table of political and academic debates until the recent global economic crisis occurred. The expansion of loans and consequentially sharp rise in debt-to-GDP ratios, job losses and business failures, food crises, rising fuel and food prices, and increasing evidence of human-induced environmental degradation and climate change helped the green economy concept find its way to a new position on the global political agenda (Richardson 2013).

The United Nations Environment Programme’s widely-used definition of a green economy envisages it as “one that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities” (UNEP 2010: 5). As an umbrella term, its broadness attracts everyone concerned about the environmental and social problems produced by the current socioeconomic system, but its vagueness creates debates and tensions. This is reflected in the sometimes contradictory economic and political ideas regarding how the currently capitalist system should be transformed. Academic and political disputes regarding what the future economy should look like are still not resolved even by this more detailed UNEP definition of a green economy, which describes it as “low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive. In a green economy,

growth in income and employment should be driven by public and private investments that reduce carbon emissions and pollution, enhance energy and resource efficiency, and prevent the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services” (UNEP 2011: 1).

*Green economy* is, therefore, a contested term associated with a great variety of concepts regarding what an economy oriented toward taking care of environmental degradation would ideally look like. Facer et al. (2014) recognize three distinctive discourses regarding the green economy. The first is the *incrementalist* discourse under the pro-growth paradigm, in which environmental limits to growth are not recognized, with an emphasis on market-based regulating mechanisms and the potential of technological solutions. The second is the *reformist* discourse, still under the paradigm of growth, but with the recognition of some environmental limits (i.e., the imperative of reducing fossil fuel production and consumption) and supportive of decoupling (separating growth from environmental pressure) through technological improvements (i.e., energy efficiency).<sup>1</sup> The third is the *transformative* discourse, which runs counter to the growth paradigm and prioritizes human rights and inclusion of the marginalized in the economy with an emphasis on absolute decoupling (a degrowth paradigm) and being wary of techno-optimistic solutions (“caution against technology as a panacea”). This last discourse also entails the cultural framing of a new kind of social actor opposed to *homo economicus*. Giorgos Kallis, one of the major proponents of the degrowth movement, prefers the values of conviviality and enjoyment in life. He even proposes the fictional hero Alexis Zorbas as a role model: “the convivial yet simple and content, enlightened human” (Kallis 2011: 879).

However, different versions of capitalism ranging from laissez-faire capitalism to social democratic and state capitalism are, likewise, the usual state of affairs when discussing an economy defined as one “in which most means of production are privately owned and production is guided and income distributed largely through the operation of markets” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). Hence, this article does not aim to predict whether a transition to a green economy will happen and, if it did prevail, which type of green economy would be dominant. The lessons from the history of capitalism could indicate that if a transition to a green economy did happen, just one form of green economy would be rather unlikely. The realization of such an all-encompassing project would probably produce many green economy variants. However, a transition to a green economy would certainly require a different entrepreneurial mindset, one that is not predominantly profit-oriented.

The cultural underpinnings of the potential transformation toward a green economy became apparent in this study, because some of our interviewees had similar values (not necessarily predominantly green-oriented) and comparable life experiences and practices, which eventually led them to green entrepreneurship. Some of our interviewees completely or

<sup>1</sup> The first two green economy discourses are part of growth culture (the fetishism of growth) as a core value and strategy of the capitalist economy. Some authors argue that empirical evidence regarding resource use and carbon emissions do not support a green growth paradigm and their model-based projections indicate that green growth “is likely to be a misguided objective” (Hickel and Kallis 2019: 1).

partially abandoned their more or less promising previous careers and education and started risky journeys in the rather nascent green entrepreneurship in Croatia. Their motivation for starting or entering an emerging green economy could be subsumed under the label *rejectionist ethic*. The rejectionist ethic<sup>2</sup> is a term used here to encompass different modes of rejecting modern economic institutions and the usual life trajectory of completing one's education and working at a job in line with one's social position and/or education.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The rejectionist ethic is bound up with profound cultural changes that accelerated particularly during the late 1960s, which then became pull factors for green entrepreneurs worldwide. Calvinist values have been regularly challenged since the early twentieth century, particularly in the US, which was becoming “a society increasingly devoted to consumer abundance, leisure, and entertainment, [where] a new ethos of self-fulfillment (rather than self-denial) gained growing legions of adherents. The hidebound strictures of ‘character’ receded while sparkling images of ‘personality’ became central . . . [and] self-fulfillment had replaced self-control” (Watts 2013: 5). However, the greatest cultural transformation happened during the countercultural revolution of the 1960s as many Western youths rejected their parents’ way of life and turned toward communal life, Eastern spirituality, and travel to “exotic” countries. A prominent researcher of hippies and counterculture described how their rejection of work confronted dominant American values: “In a nation built on the Protestant ethic, the counterculture proclaimed the heresy that play was better than work” (Miller 2012: 95).

Anita Roddick, the founder of The Body Shop and one of the early and most influential green entrepreneurs, came from this countercultural milieu. Roddick travelled intensively during the 1960s, lived on a kibbutz in Israel and visited, among other places, Africa and Polynesia. She founded her first no-frills cosmetics store in the UK in 1976. At that time her husband was travelling through South and North America and she needed money to raise their two children. Roddick herself emphasized the values that stood behind the rise of The Body Shop, which she and her husband transformed into a multinational company promoting green and ethical causes: “There is something magical about small companies run by people whose thinking was forged in the ‘60s. You sit down and ask not only how the business should be run, but also what should be done with the profits” (Horwell 2007; see also Isaak 2017).

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<sup>2</sup> The term *rejectionist ethic* was used elsewhere by Ivan Krastev (2014) to describe the rise of democratic protests led by the global middle class which were primarily about rejection and not about providing collective alternatives. Although this study deals with a different phenomenon, the term shares some of the characteristics of the movement Krastev described, particularly individualism.

Analysis of a seminal typology of green entrepreneurs by Elizabeth Walley and David Taylor shows that their ideal types that are more oriented toward sustainability were modelled after businesses influenced by the 1960s spirit (2002). The “visionary champion” type of green entrepreneur, lauded as a champion of sustainability that “sets out to change the world, operates at the leading edge and has a vision of a sustainable future that envisages hard structural change,” was explicitly modelled after Anita Roddick (Walley and Taylor 2002: 40). The “ethical maverick” type was modelled on a business that was also an offspring of the 1960s countercultural movement. This was *On the Eighth Day*, a “vegetarian cafe and health-food shop in Manchester. The partnership was set up in 1970, ‘in the height of the hippie era’, with ethical and environmental values at the heart of the business. It later became a co-operative” (Walley and Taylor 2002: 41; Hawthorne 2001).

However, both cases indicate that there were various motivations in the development of these businesses and they evolved over time, and so these types of green entrepreneurship were appropriately defined by Walley and Taylor as ideal types. In the case of Anita Roddick, the beginning of her entrepreneurship was much more “necessity entrepreneurship” (Reynolds et al. 2002) than the visionary champion type of green entrepreneurship. On the other hand, the history of *On the Eighth Day* claims that even at its beginning it also had visions of changing the world and “creating a new order” by establishing “a way of trading goods that broke away from the ideas of money commerce” (8thday.coop). However, these initial plans were soon abandoned because it “was a great place to tune in and drop out, but as an attempt to escape the clutches of capitalism it was less successful and in order to survive soon had to become a shop in the more conventional sense” (8thday.coop). The Croatian cases of green entrepreneurship studied here can be also categorized by connecting them to these ideal types (see Puđak and Bokan, this issue). However, our approach in this paper is to explore how particular layers of the Western *Zeitgeist* that confronted traditional values and lifestyles, and the Croatian social and economic context of rapid changes influenced the emergence and development of green entrepreneurship. And also to pose the question whether they could be helpful in understanding the potential transition to a green economy.

The green entrepreneurs of the 1970s mentioned above were direct offspring of the countercultural movement and values. However, the countercultural movement left a mark on American society, which became preoccupied with the search for self-fulfillment (Yankelovich 1981). During the late twentieth and early twenty-first century some countercultural values became normalized across the post-industrial West and led to a “relative lack of interest in mass-political organizations, such as parties and trades’ unions, and the embrace of relatively individualistic, ‘life-enhancing’ inter-relations at the human scale of local communities” (Scerri 2012: xi). This cultural transformation was fertile soil for the rise in both supply of and demand for green entrepreneurship. The individualistic culture and context of low trade union protection are both conducive for getting into entrepreneurship (Liñán et al. 2016; Parker 2009). The embrace of “life-enhancing” inter-relations at the human scale of local communities influenced the search for alternative patterns of

consumption, particularly those abandoning the prevailing and alienating mass production, supermarkets, and shopping malls. Moreover, in the 1970s the American middle class began to strongly lean toward *healthism*; that is, “the preoccupation with personal health as a primary—often *the* primary—focus for the definition and achievement of well-being; a goal which is to be attained primarily through the modification of life styles, with or without therapeutic help” (Crawford 1980: 368). This growing preoccupation with health was easily translated into the demand for local organic food shops and restaurants. The rejection of belief in progress and mass production industry was akin to that of the hippie culture, but now it had a more individualistic outlook.

Another development parallel to these cultural changes was the rise of a post-industrial society since the 1950s. It was also most pronounced in the US, which even at the end of the 1960s already had over 60% of its labor force employed in services (Bell 1973: 127). De-industrialization, the rise of tertiary sector employment (i.e., services), and the transition to a knowledge economy changed the landscape of the Western workplace. However, this change also brought resistance from increasingly highly educated young people, who replaced their parents’ assembly line jobs with cubicle office jobs. The rejectionist ethic is part of the growing trend of questioning the post-industrial knowledge economy as a meaningless and numbing affair. This emerging Zeitgeist has been recently captured in several popularly written academic hits (Sennett 2008; Crawford 2009; Graeber 2018). In his anthropological bestseller, David Graeber called knowledge economy jobs “bullshit jobs”: “a form of employment that is so completely pointless, unnecessary, or pernicious that even the employee cannot justify its existence” (2018: 3). Graeber’s book was a fervent attack on the knowledge economy, outsourcing, and capitalism. It was also an attack on the Calvinist work ethic, in which work was generally praised and seen to give meaning and worth to one’s life. Matthew Crawford, himself a postdoctoral researcher in the history of political thought turned motorcycle mechanic, dealt with the search for “meaningful work” and a “struggle for individual agency,” as he celebrated manual work and derided the knowledge economy (2009). Crawford, along with sociologist Richard Sennett (2008), who gave a more historically- and theoretically-oriented account of craftsmanship, emphasized virtues of crafts such as self-reliance and community cohesion.

Some of our interviewees’ green entrepreneurship could be interpreted in the context of the emerging Western Zeitgeist of dissatisfaction with the knowledge economy. However, the Croatian context (Bartlett 2004) of slow catching-up with the West and prolonged economic and social crises that created precarious working conditions also contributed to some cases of green entrepreneurship.

A comprehensive study of New Zealand ecopreneurs found a number of reasons for starting green businesses, which were acquired by coding interviews: green values, a gap in the market, making a living, being their own boss, and passion (Kirkwood and Walton 2010: 215). They also found career shift as a reason for starting the business in one case, but did not delve deeper into that reason. However, green businesses are mostly newly-founded

businesses and often do not directly stem from one's prior economic activities. Therefore, it seemed to us to be crucial to analyze the previous careers and life trajectories of our interviewees in order to understand the emergence of green entrepreneurship and its connections with changing social contexts. Thus, the decision was made to conduct in-depth analyses of green entrepreneurs that made career shifts.

## METHODS

This paper is based on a comparative, multilevel ethnographic study of green entrepreneurs in Croatia. This approach enabled us to explore the content and the structures of dominant values, lived experiences, and actions within different social and cultural contexts. Following theoretical and methodological literature and an emphasis on "situated knowledge" (Haraway 1988: 585) and situatedness (Schmidt 2019), it discusses green entrepreneurs' roles in the context of an emerging green economy. From this perspective, situatedness includes the way of seeing and understanding a specific context (Schmidt 2019), not only involvement with that context (Given 2012). Thus, situatedness also means that researchers, as persons, have no other means to access the topic of study and no other way to pursue a question than through positions that we ourselves have (Schmidt 2019: 78).

The study participants were owners of small ecological and family-owned estates, founders of renewable energy companies, organic farmers, producers of other types of environmentally-friendly products, and caterers. The ethnographic data presented in this study consisted of in-depth semi-structured interviews with seven green entrepreneurs that made radical career shifts, two that combined green entrepreneurship with their previous careers, and one green entrepreneur that lived in an eco-feminist collective. They were chosen from a sample of twenty-eight Croatian green entrepreneurs (for the full methodology and sampling see Puđak and Bokan, this issue). All interviews focused on questions dealing with different life changes and challenges regarding businesses, social relationships, values, intimate decisions and motivation, education, and health outcomes. The method of in-depth semi-structured interviews was chosen because the study aimed to describe the study participants' specific practices, values, motivation and attitudes toward the green economy and sustainability. In preparing the semi-structured interview, the basic protocol design issues were considered. The protocol questions were written in simple, clear, and neutral language, following the objectives of the study. Following ethnographic research protocol, our communication was more and sometimes less open, depending on the topics and issues. In general, our interviewees were eager to share their thoughts and experiences. Secondary sources were also used: publicly available official documents regarding the companies' foundation and business activities, companies' or organic farms' web sites, and green entrepreneurs' appearances in local and national media.

After a brief explanation in which the objectives of the study were explained to the interviewees by phone, by email, or personally, the researchers conducted interviews with

them. Every interview was taped and transcribed. The sample in this study consists of ten respondents, which includes six men and four women, who work in different areas. The oldest participant was sixty-seven and the youngest thirty-six years old. The interviewing and the transcription of interviews were done in accordance with the ethical standards and research protocols of the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb. To protect the participants' anonymity, pseudonyms have been used in place of the real names of the interviewees.

The data analysis was conducted through key topics and the researchers' explanations, which enabled a comparison of the fieldwork notes and records with the related theoretical literature. We interviewers shared our impressions and had open discussions after each interview. Also, we continuously shared field notes and prior conclusions. After several close readings we analyzed the interview transcripts, applying a comparative approach.

Fundamentally, the study participants highlight both the diversity of meanings that the green economy holds for people and the multiple roles that it plays in peoples' everyday lives. Green economy values and experiences are read as concepts whose meanings vary, depending on different situations, motivations, and life tendencies. However, the narratives about life strategies and orientations toward a green economy suggest that an underlying structure of signification relates to experiences of personal values and ethics in everyday context. The cases of career shifts are presented more or less chronologically in order to discern the influences of changing social contexts on the emergence of green entrepreneurship in Croatia.

## SOCIALIST UNEMPLOYMENT AND THE EMERGENCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE 1980s

The Croatian context was different from the Western one, because both cultural and structural turns conducive to the rejectionist ethic came more than a decade later, during the crisis of the socialist Yugoslav regime in the 1980s. In the late 1980s the first alternative groups and initiatives (i.e., not fully-fledged social movements) dealing with ecological, feminist, and peace initiatives emerged (Tomić Koludrović 1993). Also in the 1980s, the tertiary sector surpassed the secondary sector in the share of overall employees (Peračković 2011). The 1980s, following a global recession, brought a period of intense crisis of Yugoslav socialism with rising unemployment and inflation. Current workers, but also potential workers were rejected by the system through the periods of socialist and, later, of more pronounced capitalist unemployment (Woodward 1995; Šonje and Vujčić 1999).

Ana, a university educated (STEM)<sup>3</sup> organic farmer and food producer in her late sixties, living in a medium-sized town, never worked in the profession she was qualified for:

<sup>3</sup> For the sake of anonymity, general terms are used to describe interviewees' university education. The abbreviation STEM is used for university education in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, and SSH is for social sciences and humanities.



*At that time it was “should I find a job or not?” That was during the great economic crisis in Yugoslavia, just before the war, and it was very hard to get a job. Specifically in my profession . . . there was no work.*

As she had inherited family land, she decided to devote herself to agriculture in the early 1980s. She used traditional crops and did not apply pesticides. Ana explained that her move from her original career was highly perplexing to her milieu. This was particularly so under socialism, because private initiative was not heralded, and Yugoslav socialism propagated urbanization and industrialization (Halpern 1969). But in the mid-1980s, Ana's unusual career path was also followed by her husband, *who worked at a company at that time, left that job, and completely switched to agriculture*. However, until the second half of the 1980s, green issues and lifestyle were far from prominent in Yugoslav and Croatian societies. At the end of the 1980s, one of the first health and natural food shops in Yugoslavia open in Zagreb, and Ana was able to sell her products there.

Although one could say that her usual career path was mostly rejected by the system, Ana's description of positive characteristics of her work also indicates some elements of the “inner” rejectionist ethic:

*Just to make it clear. Nobody can get rich doing that, but you can make an average living. A big advantage is that you're your own boss, that nobody harasses you, that there is no mobbing. Isn't it like that? That there's nobody you have to stand still for at six or seven in the morning, to be somewhere, locked up. I don't know, to even ask if you can go to the toilet. This is a big advantage. A second big advantage is that you're doing something healthy. You're pretty much always in healthy air, outdoors, no stress, in a clean environment. I mean, regarding health, there's nothing better. That's what all the doctors always advise: move, eat healthy, be in the fresh air, don't get fat. How can you get fat if you run around all day in the fields? You get fat through sitting, inaction.*

Here she depicts her work as a road to autonomy and health. On the other hand, Ana's values could not be deemed radical ecological or degrowth oriented, because she also claims that it is impossible to feed the whole population with organic farming and emphasized the importance of a rising GDP and thriving economy:

*The basis of everything is the economy. If we get the economy going and raise that GDP, everything is settled. Only then we can talk about... Because this is the basis for everything else. For ecology and everything.*

She and her husband are still working in organic farming and food production, and are planning to move from their urban setting to their farm.

The mid-1980s were marked by the development of the first ecological groups in socialist Yugoslavia and Croatia, where they were mostly centered in Zagreb (Oštrić 1992; Tomić Koludrović 1993). An owner of organic food stores in his early sixties living in Zagreb used to belong to these groups. However, Matko could not find deeper meaning in a politically oriented type of ecological activism. He characterized this sort of activism as shallow ecology and compared it to deep ecology, which he thought can change “predatory” behavior causing ecological crisis.<sup>4</sup> At that time, he turned toward Eastern philosophies and lifestyles and travelled to the Far East for a spiritual journey. However, meeting his future wife and business partner was a decisive moment for not completely rejecting the Western way of life: *and definitely, had I not met her, I’d definitely be somewhere in the mountains* (Matko).

So he came back to Zagreb to promote alternative lifestyles. His future wife decided to abandon her career in academia (SSH) and join him in this endeavor. When asked whether she learned about ecological and sustainability themes during her education, Blaženka unexpectedly talked about 1960s music:

*Unfortunately not, except in my fascination with music. Music which, at the end of the 1960s, beginning of the 1970s, came from hippie culture, and then this culture also had in itself a different relationship with nature, and so on. Through music I was connected with this kind of living and the activism that came from this culture. So, this musical world . . . Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, and so on and then to me when I met Matko, that was it. That was full circle.*

Eventually, they opened a restaurant and organic food store together in Zagreb in the early 1990s. They profited from belonging to the milieu of the 1980s nascent civil society from which they draw both customers and employees of their expanding business. Although their value system could be deemed as ecologism, there was a strong inclination toward healthy lifestyles, inner fulfilment, and a life philosophy they called “personal ecology.”

## TRANSITION TO CAPITALISM

The de-industrialization of the Croatian economy was more traumatic than that of Western economies, due to a tumultuous transition to capitalism that was impacted by the war, the loss of the Yugoslav market, and corrupt privatization (Bartlett 2004). Contrary to Western and even other Central and Eastern European economies, the Croatian transition to a knowledge economy was stalled. Unemployment was a push-factor for some of necessity green entrepreneurs interviewed, who turned toward organic farming and food production. The Croatian state started regulating organic farming in 2001. The

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<sup>4</sup> Matko traced inclinations toward deep ecology to his “post-pubescent rage.”

period of economic recovery, followed by the opening of post-authoritarian Croatia in 2000, was also marked by faster growth in the number of organic farmers, from 2003 (Pejnović et al. 2012: 143).

One organic farmer in his late forties, from a medium-sized town characterized by mono-employment (Bičanić and Pribičević 2009) and low wages, went to the industrial high school in the 1980s. But because the local industry was losing the significance it had in previous decades, Radovan did a vocational retraining to become a salesperson in the early 1990s. However, his career as a salesperson was also precarious throughout the 1990s and 2000s. The following quote elucidates Radovan's disappointment with precarious employment:

*It was like, you know. You work. You don't work. You work. You don't work. It got on my nerves to "volunteer" for fifteen, twenty years. Everything got on my nerves.*

Thus, he started to grow exotic plants on his friends' unused land. Eventually, he decided to turn to organic farming and food production in the early 2010s. After consulting with his wife, he decided to lease some land more than 10 km away from the place they lived and started an organic farming food business. His career shift was certainly not driven by environmentalist values; regarding climate change he expressed the opinion that *we are not so much responsible for this. There were ice ages and there have to be periods of drought. It's just cycles repeating themselves*. At the time of the interview he was still an owner of a small family farm and the sole employee. He struggled with profitability of the farm, but emphasized the sense of fulfilment that came with his work:

*I get up in the morning, sit in the car, drive there, and nobody is nagging me. You work for yourself, so this is something that is always satisfactory. You're out there in nature.*

Radovan used sarcasm when he talked about the possibility of becoming rich thanks to his business. In his description of the harvest, which is the end of organic farming process of his business and the foundation for subsequent food production, there was a clear leaning toward conviviality rather than toward profit orientation:

*Our harvest lasted for one morning. Actually, this harvest is more of a gathering. There are more of us than there is need, but, you know, all of them are employed, all of them are here in town. And the people from whom we leased the land, there are four of them, and they help us, because we're tight with them and we've become friends.*

A similar story was that of another organic farmer in his early fifties from the same town, who also had an industrial high school education, but worked for more than twenty years as a salesperson. Miron was laid off in the early 2010s during the financial crisis.

After being laid off he decided to start with organic farming and food production. He and his wife, who had been gardening from an early age, founded a small family farm. Miron's narrative was full of criticism toward the modern way of life:

*But that return to nature, it's important. People are isolated. He lives in forty-eight square meters of apartment and seven acres of sky, does he?! It's unbelievable. He goes on the balcony and doesn't even notice that there's a sunset. He doesn't see it, because he's out there smoking and thinking about what else he wants to play, type,<sup>5</sup> or do. People are overburdened. Horrors!*

At the time of the interview they were leaving organic farming, due to high costs and not being able to sell their products at a reasonable price. Miron mentioned that, unlike Željko Mavrović, he did not have initial capital to invest in business, "and you know how that ended." He was referring to former boxing champion Mavrović, who in 2001 started an organic farming and food business, which received considerable media and even academic attention (Odinsky-Zec and Stubbs, 2009; Omažić, 2010). Despite favorable preconditions, Mavrović's business endeavor collapsed in 2012 during the prolonged economic crisis that has plagued Croatian economy. Mavrović's motivation for green entrepreneurship also had rejectionist elements. His green entrepreneurship came after an abrupt rejection of the hazardous life of a professional boxer. He retired after his first defeat in his professional boxing career at the age of 29, quite early for a heavyweight champion. Asked why he did not continue with a career as a boxing coach he later admitted: *I wanted to run away from sports. I was searching for peace, for a place where I could lick my wounds and create a new idea of myself. And that was organic farming and baking* (Brajdić 2018).

Conviviality was also inherent to Miron, similar to Radovan's narrative. This is how he described the future of their family estate they were planning to adapt for eco-tourism purposes, in which their adult children were not interested:

*I don't see them in this. They love to come here with their crowd, and we celebrate, we roast something. And in the future I see that I will have my dream and my wish come true. That on that big field there's a stage, and it's called "local Woodstock."*

The next interviewee was in his mid-thirties and far more adapted to an emerging knowledge economy than the two prior interviewees; however, he also turned toward green entrepreneurship. Marko was university-educated (STEM) and worked in the knowledge economy, but he found no self-fulfillment there:

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<sup>5</sup> In the interview he often talked about younger people's obsession with cell phones, so this part of the statement could be connected to this line of thought.

*At one moment, at the end of 2008, I felt a fall in energy levels, constantly tired, absent-minded, couldn't find any goal in life, and. . . It bothered me very much. It lasted for two or three years while I was working at an IT company and lost my own way.*

So after almost of decade of pursuing a promising career in the IT sector he decided to change his lifestyle and he turned toward alternative medicine and healthy eating. Together with his university-educated wife (SSH) they distributed organic food to their friends and eventually opened an organic food producing company. He talked how physical work in which he got engaged contributed to his recovery:

*Physical work really made me. . . I was sick for one day and three of them came to replace me for the same amount of work, which for me is a piece of cake, and they were dead tired.*

Marko also compared working with food with his prior career in IT:

*With food, everything is slower. This is not a service like an IT program, which I bring to ten places and sell it. I can't sell the same apple in ten places, but I have to wait for three trees to bear fruit. There are always optimums.*

Working with natural products made him think of limits to growth and later in the interview he emphasized this influence: *I draw a lot of inspiration from nature. If a tree can't grow indefinitely, then the economy can't either.* Although Marko clearly had, or had developed, ecologist values, his main motivation for green entrepreneurship was primarily his inner dissatisfaction with his previous job.

Organic food production also became a career choice for another university-educated couple. Zlatka, who runs their registered business, and her husband, who deals with the production, now both in their early forties, were a couple already as university students, and they got involved in healthy eating and veganism. Already as students (SSH) they made homemade organic food for their friends and their interest in food production grew step by step. Zlatka encouraged her partner to reject a normal career path and get involved in food production:

*He didn't finish his MA studies. He gave up, but I think . . . Actually, this was smart [laughter] I asked him all the time: "Why are you still doing this?" Because he was interested in it (food production) and everything about it. He is more of an expert in this than a food technologist with some degree but no experience with this sort of food.*  
Interviewer: *So you started because of love?*

*Well, yes . . . So we fed ourselves that way, and the opportunity arose. We saw that there was a need, and then little by little, as students, we produced for our friends, a*

*little bit more, a little bit more. And then we couldn't do this little bit more in our kitchen any longer, so we opened a business.*

Zlatka also decided not to follow a normal career path, because it did not give her a sense of fulfilment:

*I couldn't work at a school, that wasn't a job that gave me the motivation to get out of bed. When I wake up in the morning, I wake up because I know I have a sense of purpose in life. I'm doing something that doesn't pollute the environment, doesn't harm anybody.*

They started with their registered business in the early 2000s and grew to more than 10 employees before the crisis. However, their endeavor was struck by the crisis and they had to let go of several employees. She insisted on a narrative of hard work, unavoidable stress, and success: *those who succeed are always ready to do whatever it takes for their business. We are, too. When you have to, you work.* The story of this young couple was also an example of the rejectionist ethic, because they were not able to find their calling according to their university educations. Starting a business that responded to their lifestyles and diets became their road toward happiness and self-fulfillment, as was the case with Marko and his wife.

## INCOMPLETE REJECTION

Some of the interviewees expressed that green entrepreneurship offered them more satisfaction than their current jobs that were unrelated to green economy. However, they were not ready to totally abandon their original careers or education and combined them with their green entrepreneurship, which more or less incidentally became their new primary career.

A successful trader wanted a different challenge after having a more than ten-year career dealing mostly with mergers and acquisitions. Ivan, now in his early sixties, compared trading unfavorably with production in terms of skills and satisfaction:

*I don't think that trade and production can, by any means, be compared regarding challenges and adrenalin. I think that trade is . . . I won't underestimate it, but buying and selling is far less of a skill than producing and selling a product. Placing a product with its quality and price, redirecting it, it's not easy, because then it's your product. And it's easier to buy and sell someone else's product.*

After five years in a managerial position, he thought about a career change and *made a firm decision that it had to be something else, something completely different, and thought about it, I can't remember for how long.* Therefore, Ivan decided to invest capital from his business

in the production of renewable energy equipment in the late 2000s. Croatia at that time started to initiate schemes for development of new renewable energy sources (Šimleša 2010). The process through which Western capitalism was heading toward financial capitalism and the subsequent fall of employment in productive sectors throughout Western societies (i.e., deindustrialization) have been heavily criticized and certainly contributed to the new celebration of craftsmanship, which was reflected in Crawford's and Sennet's work. In the Croatian context, as a consequence of rapid and traumatic de-industrialization, financial capitalism and the import orientation of the domestic economy were particularly disparaged. Thus, entrepreneurs in the industrial sector that manage to export their products are heralded in Croatian media as potential saviors of the Croatian economy. This was particularly so in the green economy, because some of the young green entrepreneurs are heralded as the future of Croatian economy (see Rončević et al. 2019).

Ivan was able to develop his business into a large enterprise, although economic crisis and global competition jeopardized his venture into the unknown sector. He also remained involved in his primary career, which contained far less risk. He espoused certain ecological values and concluded that *it's better to follow nature than to rape nature*. Nevertheless, his turn toward green entrepreneurship came primarily from his internal motivation to do something else, something that would require different skills than trading. As global and national contexts opened up an opportunity for investment in renewable energy Ivan found this to be *trendy and profitable*.

Another green entrepreneur that contributed to the rise of a green economy, while continuing with his previous work, came from a different background than Ivan. He was more an example of a hybrid entrepreneur; that is, one that has a *primary wage job and a secondary job in self-employment* (Folta et al. 2010). Božidar, an industrial high school-educated owner of an organic farm and organic food and apparel production in his mid-forties, first decided to have a retreat from his unpleasant and hazardous working-class job. Božidar has been doing this sort of work in various industries for most of his working life:

*I first decided to do some kind of agriculture. To get into green, because all I'd been doing in my life was working in smelly halls, smelly facilities. So, for me it was just an escape, to run away to something green, because that green was where I felt good. It wasn't important what kind of green. So only when you start thinking about green, only then it becomes important to you from where it came from, how it grew, and what I can do so that we don't go totally amiss.*

In this quote he gave a prototypical mechanism of the rejectionist ethic unintentionally turning into green entrepreneurship. He saw agriculture as a partial retreat from his wage job, but gradually got interested in organic farming and turned this retreat into a business. He kept his primary wage job, but he and his wife became devoted to their private business, where she is employed. Božidar explained his hybrid entrepreneurship with the following

statement: *I can't let my whole family work at the same place. This [business] doesn't stand on its own two feet enough that I could risk that. That I could have two kids and now we're going to ...*

The last two cases also displayed the rejectionist ethic tendencies of two individuals not being self-fulfilled with their careers. Although they come from different class positions, neither was ready to completely abandon their original careers and education for financial reasons.

## THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REJECTIONIST ETHIC

The life trajectories of some of the Croatian green entrepreneurs presented here indicate that they were not primarily interested in greening the economy or the world. They were primarily trying to abandon their previous educational and working lives, which they connected to a sense of not being healthy and/or not finding meaning in life. Most importantly, they wanted to find some kind of greater self-fulfillment in their working lives. Due to social, economic, and cultural changes their rejectionist ethic was transformed into a contribution to the growing sector of healthy lifestyles and green businesses.

Also, an important private dimension was present, as the rejectionist ethic was limited and often transformed in a business endeavor by the influence of significant others. Their life partners almost regularly became their business partners as well, which in entrepreneurship literature is also known as entrepreneurial couples or “copreneurs” (Barnett and Barnett 1988). Those rejectionists whose partners did not become their business partners also included in the interviews stories of talking with their partners when looking for approval to start anew.

The green economy actors described here come from different class and educational backgrounds, and have different attitudes toward environmental values and work. Their businesses had various levels of recognition and financial success. Conviviality is a theme that emerged as some of the interviewees, mostly necessity entrepreneurs, presented their work and talked about the average and below-average salaries, or bare subsistence, that their businesses provided for them. Others talked more about the hard work and sacrifices necessary in order to develop successful business, employ more people and ensure salaries for their employees, which more resembled Weber's Protestant ethic.<sup>6</sup> But, what they all had in common, and what was contrary to Weber's thesis on origins of capitalism, is that they questioned their previous callings and looked for deeper meaning in their work. All of the rejectionist interviewees lived in urban environments when they were interviewed. However, a lot of them were either born or spent their childhoods in villages and occasionally offered sentimental reminiscences about those times. Those dealing with organic farming transferred their workplace to rural areas, and some of them were planning to move to rural areas, too.

<sup>6</sup> However, even these types of entrepreneurs had a different attitude toward profit than traditional businesses. Blaženka concluded that *profit as my own earnings can't get me out of bed, can't motivate me to do what I'm doing*.



## ALTERNATIVE ECONOMIES AND THE “NEGLECTED ECONOMY”

The last mentioned characteristic of the rejectionist ethic, the preference for rural life is often present in another challenge to modern capitalism, which is covered in the final part of the article. These are different economies and practices as alternatives to mainstream capitalism. Around the globe, alternative modes of social and economic organizations with different kinds of interactions are on the rise: associative production (i.e., cooperatives), non-monetary currencies, local trading schemes (i.e., non-monetary exchange), fair and ethical trade, ethical banking, social entrepreneurship, and so on. These alternative initiatives have mostly flourished since the economic crisis of 2008, and those engaged in them express criticism of exploitation, competitiveness, and profit-seeking all with an aim of creating an economic system that fulfils human needs instead of capital accumulation (Castells 2017; Sánchez-Hernández and Glückler 2019; Zademach and Hillebrand 2013). Through challenging current forms of capitalism, alternative economies seek to transition toward a sustainable economic system, one goal of which is also being recognized as a green economy endeavor.

In the Croatian case, alternative economic actors have been rather extensively studied (e.g., Orlić 2014; Bokan 2016; Puđak et al. 2016). We interviewed Neva, a woman in her late thirties, who combined having an organic farm and being one of the founding members of an eco-feminist collective. This became her life choice after she gave up her university education several times and *travelled a bit* in her mid-twenties. Her attitudes toward the working environment and the way Neva embraced an alternative way of life are shown here. More precisely, Neva decided to find her future working and living in an eco-agricultural community situated on an Adriatic island, where she has been for more than ten years. Neva described her motivations and aspirations as follows:

*Well, I think that when you think about the perspective that the youth have in the city, you can't really say that they do have a perspective. I mean it's okay if you're educated and, specifically, if you're very good at something that is very sought after on the market, then it's all right. However, there is less and less of that and I think it's actually becoming harder and harder for people to live in the city, since there are too many people and too few jobs.*

Her shift from her former life options; that is, getting a university education and living in a big city, is not only visible in her move to the Adriatic island, but also in the different social values she embraced while living with a group of young women in a small island settlement. She herself states that: *Women are much better at understanding eco-agriculture, because in some way they are more connected to the Earth.*

She describes the women's connection through an eco-feminist perspective, which overturns the dominant dichotomous social roles, and explains:

*Well, I don't know, it's the eco-feminist theory of connectedness. I feel that there are no boundaries, no differences. No hierarchy at all. And the story goes that in fact I didn't come here to the land of my grandfathers, but I arrived with two friends of mine, with whom I lived in Rijeka. While in Rijeka, we had already decided to move somewhere to the country, to live in nature and try to build some kind of self-sustainable living. We were considering Istria, but the idea was dropped, and then Dalmatia and the islands, which, although being harsher, seemed to offer us more work and to be somehow closer, despite one of us being from Zagreb and the other from Split. And so we sought a house to rent to begin with, then we found something, and this is how it all started, this community that lived on other people's land for some time and was learning all sorts of things.*

Their “female” resistance not only represents a shift from the usual life guidelines, but also a specific orientation toward the future, through a different interpretation of traditional knowledge and values along with understanding of sustainability. Furthermore, their resistance is specific in their attempt to be active in many ways, thus opening up space for a different kind of entrepreneurship, such as eco-tourism.

However, when the discussion on institutional support is deepened through analysis of their experience with various social actors, this broader social context obtains a different nuance, due to a series of specific shortcomings.

*The state provides very little, five kuna per olive tree, I think. And then the municipality keeps the money from the state and doesn't give it to the people, and so all sorts of things happen.*

Despite the political strategies and the importance of the green economy in Croatia, which is a common part of action plans, these principles, as our interviewee puts it, are usually simply given lip service. It is up to individuals to fight for their own existence, overcoming a heap of administrative obstacles. In her interview, Neva stated:

*Generally, there are countless problems. The first problem goes for anyone, not just eco-agriculture, not only on the islands, but throughout Croatia. We had legal issues . . . because I inherited something here and nothing is clear there and I can't register myself nor my family farm here, but I still own eight thousand square meters and two hundred olive trees. I'm unable to earn money from it, despite having the land. I mean, my family has it, and nobody in the family works in agriculture, so the land stays neglected, and I would like to enlarge it, which I can't do, because holding the land and owning the land are two different things. Until everything is legally set. I would say that our administration and the agency and the advisory services are very harmful. Indeed, you need to go through paperwork in order to work in agriculture,*

*but this bureaucracy is . . . . There are incentives for projects and I think this gives an opportunity, but here it's such a complex process, and a very slow one. You need to go to a hundred thousand workshops and presentations, a hundred thousand offices to get the information. Because those who should know the information mostly don't know it. By which I mean the agencies and so on.*

In that context, green entrepreneurs can be defined as “neglected entrepreneurs” because they are often at the periphery of the state institutions’ interest. This is how our interviewee describes the state institutions’ concern:

*In principle, everybody is talking about it, supporting it, but in fact . . . there are some stronger concrete measures for eco-agriculture, but in general I think this administration is absolutely bad and the state treats small family farms awfully, be they ecological or conventional, they don't stand a chance. We have organized ourselves well to form an association and then act in some other way.*

Not only state institutions inspire such attitudes. Neva also points out the lack of support of research and expert institutions, which could be more involved in many aspects and help ecological production and green economies. Neva said to us:

*There isn't really direct cooperation, and I think there is a lack of some research institutions, particularly in ecological production. We do some research, but can't implement it in our olive groves. There needs to be a scientific institution doing experiments that would tell us what to do. This way, we kind of experiment on our own and actually reduce our yield that way.*

In their approach to situatedness, Muhr et al. (2016) argue that being situated within a different social and economic context influences people’s agencies and roles. Therefore, to understand the multiplicity of green entrepreneurship, theories of the green economy must engage with situated contexts, including professional roles, and the liminal locales of work in relation to institutions and organizations. Facing different agendas of working and interacting with institutional actors that have different preferences and priorities, this paper describes how the green economy can be experienced as a neglected economy.

## CONCLUSION

Just as there are different discourses on the green economy, there are also different working practices and visions of what the future economy could look like among the green entrepreneurs interviewed. They also range from more growth oriented to those that tend toward

degrowth orientations. However, it could be argued that several cultural and structural tendencies characteristic of Western societies in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century and the specific Croatian context of prolonged economic crises were conducive for the creation of a latent cultural factor that drives individuals toward green entrepreneurship. We have termed this factor the “rejectionist ethic”, an underlying life philosophy of not being content with usual life trajectories and working lives, which was later transformed in various versions of green entrepreneurship. Similar to the case of Calvinist values’ influence on the rise of the capitalist economy, the influence of this particular strand of postmaterialist culture on the rise of the green economy seems not to be quite straightforward. Our interviewees that made career shifts had different social backgrounds and different levels of preoccupation with pro-environmental values and behavior, and some even espoused anti-environmentalist attitudes. However, their search for self-fulfillment, autonomy, and healthier conditions in their working lives resulted in their becoming green entrepreneurs, as green entrepreneurship was becoming a sought-after activity.

Their adaptation to their new roles differed, because some of them were able to expand their businesses and became recognized as “successful green entrepreneurs”, whereas others struggled to keep their businesses afloat. However, those that were not involved in their previous careers anymore did not mention going back to their old working lives. Their rejection of their previous way of life was, at the time of the interviews, complete, and they were becoming part of an emerging green economy. More research is needed to find out how outspread and influential the rejectionist ethic is. As this article was in its final phase of writing, a story, similar to the ones presented here, was published in a major Croatian newspaper (Šimić 2020). A young former employee in IT sector with two incomplete degrees who couple years ago left the city to live in the countryside was starting organic farming with his family. While describing the benefits of his new calling a young farmer talked about an “indescribable feeling of freedom” (Haršanji 2019).

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## ZAVRINITVENA ETIKA IN DUH ZELENEGA GOSPODARSTVA: ZAHODNI ZEITGEIST, HRVAŠKI KONTEKST IN ZELENPODJETNIŠTVO

*Članek predstavi, kako so različne ravni zahodnega zeitgeista in hrvaškega socialnega in gospodarskega konteksta vplivale na nastanek in razvoj zelenega podjetništva. Avtorji v prispevku pojasnijo, da je zeleno gospodarstvo sporen izraz, ki je povezan z veliko različnimi razlagami, kako bi v idealnem primeru bilo videti gospodarstvo, ki se posveča skrbi za okolje. Ob tem razložijo, da »zavrinitvena etika« kot izraz, povezan s pristopom zelene ekonomije, vključuje različne načine zavračanja sodobnih ekonomskih institucij in običajno življenjsko usmeritev dokončanja izobrazbe in dela na delovnem mestu v skladu s socialnim položajem oziroma*

*izobrazbo. Hrvaški kontekst, ki ga opisujejo, je drugačen od siceršnjega zahodnega, saj so tako kulturni kot strukturni obrati, ki vodijo k zavrnitveni etiki, nastopili več kot desetletje pozneje, v času krize socialističnega jugoslovanskega režima v osemdesetih letih. Zato med zelenimi podjetniki, ki so bili tudi sogovorniki v raziskavi, obstajajo različne delovne prakse in vizije, kako bi bilo lahko videti gospodarstvo v prihodnosti. Njihove vizije se raztezajo od tistih, ki so bolj usmerjene k rasti, do onih, ki se nagibajo k odrasti (angl. degrowth). Ob tem je treba dodati, da so različne kulturne in strukturne tendence, značilne za zahodne družbe v poznem 20. in začetku 21. stoletja, ter specifični hrvaški kontekst z dolgotrajno gospodarsko krizo pripomogli k oblikovanju latentnega kulturnega dejavnika, ki posameznike usmerja k zelenemu podjetništvu. Ta dejavnik so avtorji poimenovali »zavrnitvena etika«. Po njihovem je to temeljna življenjska filozofija, utemeljena na nezadovoljstvu z običajnimi življenjskimi smernicami in načinom dela, ki se izraža v različnih oblikah zelenega podjetništva. Podobno kot so protestantske vrednote vplivale na vzpon kapitalistične ekonomije, tudi ta posebna smer post-materialistične kulture vpliva na porast zelene ekonomije. Proces pa, kot piše v prispevku, ni enostaven. Sogovorniki, ki so spremenili svoje kariere, so živeli v različnih družbenih okoliščinah in so se na različne načine angažirali na področju okoljskega zagovornišтва, nekateri med njimi pa so celo zagovarjali stališča, ki so okoljevarstvu nasprotovala. Njihovo iskanje samoizpolnitve, samostojnosti in bolj zdravih življenjskih in delovnih razmer pa je povzročilo, da so postali zeleni podjetniki, in to tudi zato, ker je takšno podjetništvo postalo vse bolj zaželeno. Njihova zavrnitev prejšnjega načina življenja je bila v času raziskave popolna in postali so del nastajajoče zelene ekonomije. Kot pojasnijo avtorji, bo potrebnih še več raziskav, da bi ugotovili, kako razširjena in vplivna je dejansko zavrnitvena etika.*

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Dr. Nikola Petrović, Research Associate, Urban/Rural and Science Research Centre (URSRC), Institute for Social Research in Zagreb, Frankopanska 22, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia, nikola@idi.hr

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Dr. Lana Peternel, Research Associate, Centre for Research in Social Inequalities and Sustainability (CIDNO), Institute for Social Research in Zagreb, Frankopanska 22, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia, lanapeternel@idi.hr

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Dr. Branko Ančić, Research Associate, Centre for Research in Social Inequalities and Sustainability (CIDNO), Institute for Social Research in Zagreb, Frankopanska 22, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia, branko@idi.hr

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