

Money doesn't have any value

# Putting soul into the economy

**Stop wanting to have more or focus on possession. Start giving! That's the adage of two former banking professionals and a business strategist who are trying to shape our new gift economy. Realistic? "Your purpose in life unfolds based on what you give"**

by Trea van Vliet photo Hapé Smeele translation: Jeroen Timmers

A thought experiment. Imagine that the euro would collapse. Greece, Spain, Italy and Spain follow suit. And eventually the Netherlands. Banks collapse and cash withdrawal will be impossible. A disaster? Most likely. But still; it would give us an opportunity to discover that it wouldn't be the end of the world. Could the world survive without money? That thought fascinates three young professionals. They believe it would. Recently they gave up their jobs and security to use their strengths for the creation of a gift economy. Starting point: it is not about "possession and protection" but about 'giving': the best of yourself, your talents, your passion. Not only individuals, but businesses should give more. Not with the expectation of reciprocity, but unconditionally. *Deep down*, all people want to *give*. But we've been taught that nothing in this world is for free. Still, the presumed obviousness that everything has its financial value is merely an agreement. A rusty one indeed, but also one with potentially disastrous consequences for mankind and earth.

Julia Falger (40, until recently consultant at the Triodos Foundation) always had an interest for alternative currencies. Convinced that soon we will face big changes within our monetary system, she organized brainstorm sessions about the role of money and 'Giving' with Robbert Vesseur (26, ex-banking professional at Triodos Bank). These brainstorm sessions were so inspiring to Robbert that he decided to give up his job. At this very moment he is gathering a network of people that want to shape a gift economy. His letter to Ode brought about many reactions. An then there is Jeroen Timmers (31). The business strategist soon had enough of professional life: "It looked like an adults' kindergarten full of Egos and territoriality to me". When his

relationship ended after 10 years and his learning curve was flattening out he decided say goodbye to his job and went for a world travel. With unexpected consequences, which lead us to elaborate on this thought experiment: five perspectives on a gift economy.

## 1. We live in a world of 'apparent value'

Jeroen: "Prior to my world trip, I bought my ticket to Lowlands Festival for twice the amount of the normal sales price. Once I returned from my travels, I looked at that ticket and thought: this is our economy. Resellers add no true value. And we allow them to exist. I decided to unconditionally give away my ticket to a random person." Then things went crazy: "Thousands of reactions through my blog and per email. Not only from the Lowlands fan base, but also from people who didn't want my ticket at all but merely wanted to express their support in my quest." *NRC Next (leading Dutch newspaper, J.) picked it up, just like the festival director who gave him a free tickets*". The effect? "Every single day I am talking to businesses on how they can experience this same power of giving"

## 2. Money isn't the solution but the problem

Robbert: "During the brainstorm sessions at Triodos we concluded that the biggest flaw in our economy is the fact that we perceive money to be equal to value. True value is about the bread the baker bakes, the bike that's produced, the care a doctor gives, etcetera...But money has become a goal in itself and is gradually losing its function of facilitating flexible transaction of products and services." Julia: "Nowadays, we obtain self-esteem and sense of security through money. We are misusing it in that sense, because self-esteem and security are the last things to be found in money." Besides, money doesn't have a natural property of saturation like a bike, a bread or a service (you can only ride one bike at a time, etc...) That's why we've lost our sense of "enough is enough".

*"Purpose of life is giving.  
Everything flows.  
Blocking flow will make you ill"*



Julia Falger, Robbert Vesseur and Jeroen Timmers gave up their jobs and security to dedicate themselves to a gift economy

Robbert: “ Thus, the economy has to grow infinitely. The larger the cake, the better for everyone. At least that’s what we think. Infinite grow is impossible. It destructs our earth because it is unnatural, it runs against the natural pattern of nature. Life evolves in circles: rising, shining, falling. Infinite growth is an illusion, according to Robbert. “ Growth can only exist because of shortage elsewhere. We are consuming all of Earth’s natural resources faster than she can replenish. Infinite growth is destruction. But we don’t see it, yet, because it occurs outside of what we are able to see and are not directly influenced by it.”

### 3. Giving is our natural state of being

Jeroen: “Our purpose in life unfolds based on what we give. Giving is the natural flow of our being.” A too optimistic view on mankind? Jeroen doesn’t think so: “ Look at our physical bodies. Any blockage in your muscles will lead to problems. Tense or cramped muscles? It’s all a matter of energy not freely flowing through. A body that withholds its energy from flowing will become ill. We should take that insight as a foundation of a new economy.

*“I was afraid of my salary. Absurdly high. It was blocking me.”*

The soul has to return in our economy and giving will play a central role in that process. This year I will launch my platform [Givolicious.com](https://www.givolicious.com), which has the intent of uniting givers and receivers. The giving party, say Philips, can give their services or products to a social enterprise (businesses that show that a higher social purpose goes hand in hand with profit). In return, Philips will receive inspiration and purpose. And the social enterprise will get all the opportunities to flourish. Which they deserve as they are changing the face of business as we speak.”

### 4. Letting go of fear, finding Oneness

Jeroen: “The past couple of millennia we’ve conditioned ourselves to adhere to a fragmented worldview. We see borders between countries, between people, between ourselves and objects. Such a worldview drives competition. But everything is one. This awareness gradually comes to mind, now we will have to learn to live in harmony with it. That process is a spiritual one and requires to relieve ourselves from any physical, mental and emotional blockages.”

Julia has been through that process. For all my life I have been fascinated by money and the power structures that go along with it. Losing God and clinging to money is a major theme within my family. After my education I stepped into the world of banking and literally became ill to see what money does to people. A lot of my colleagues couldn't keep up with the working pace and pressure without cocaine or alcohol. They had to escape in order for them to function properly." Her last employer Triodos Bank distinguishes itself through its focus on sustainability, taking into regard people and planet. But even a sustainable bank has to make profit. Although the provisions are lower vis-à-vis other banks, they still are there. And when returns aren't according to expectations, all kind of control mechanisms come into play. "Again that fear of 'not enough' and the urge to control it. "But if the world revolves around control instead of trust, things start to go wrong." She radically changed her own life. "I always feared my salary, and thought it to be so absurdly high that it blocked me. At the same time I was afraid of losing my money. At a certain point I couldn't stand it anymore and started to give away a lot of my money and possessions. It made me terribly afraid, but taught me how to trust. Living made place for living with God to me. I feel guided and loved even when nobody's around."

#### 5. The role of politicians is over

Jeroen: "Politicians will not provide the solution. They think in terms of steering, control and protection. While in essence life should be about letting go, surrendering to chaos and change. It is about what you and I do, we are 'the system' . The challenges might not be as big as we think. We can start small, because giving is all we have. Love, support, knowledge, time, you name it. And if people and businesses start to see that this evolves into something 'bigger than themselves', they naturally want to take part. And that's when things start to roll. The three already took that step themselves, without the security of a job. But how does that work in daily life? Jeroen: "With [Giving is All we Have](#) I give presentations, and workshops for businesses about giving, purpose and doing business in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century society. All on a donation-based pricing model. Because I can't determine the actual value of my services delivered. Besides that, I ignite all kind of initiatives with and for businesses to get this world to give, [Givolicious](#) being the first. Robbert: "Currently I live of my savings and am investigating how I can gain experience with a give society with a couple of people. Preferably in a small community, I would love that. Some other countries already have those kind of communities. Julia: "I am going to live in Kenia for a while to experience what it is to live without security, dependent on people and nature. Without money or means. I believe that such an experience in Africa will teach me things that I can use to change our current monetary system. When the inevitable changes in our system will come, I hope to use that teachings to bridge the old with the new."

## Evolving Gift Economy

The gift economy is evolving as we speak. Seven examples.

Three day festival Lowlands will provide a platform for '[Giving is All we Have](#)' to get 55.000 people Give. The festival director of Lowlands, Eric van Eerdenburg, asked Jeroen Timmers to come up with a proposal for that.

**Transition Towns:** worldwide chain of initiatives in cities to become sustainable and self-supporting. In the Netherlands there are 83 of those initiatives already. Example: an organic garden in Rotterdam where neighbours use their time and energy to nurture and share their food supply

**Wederkerigheid.nl:** platform on which professionals offer their services, in exchange for volunteering hours that the receiving party will have to do somewhere else.

An initiative of the Dutch political party for Animal rights: as government failed, people themselves bought 23.000 trees and planted them locally.

**Het NatuurCollege** (founded by princess Irene) organizes meetings with youngsters about a Gift Economy.

**Couchsurfing:** people around the world sharing free places to stay over: [www.couchsurfing.com](http://www.couchsurfing.com)

**Open source:** started among software developers, nowadays the concept is being used for the development of cars, drinks, government policy, education material, art and media like for example Wikipedia [nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open\\_source](http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_source).

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