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THE POLYMERIZED MONETARY COMMUNITY OF A COMPLEMENTARY LOCAL CURRENCY IN FRANCE

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ABSTRACT:

In France, complementary local currencies have been growing rapidly over the past decade, raising questions about the socio-cultural profiles of their individual users. This study, conducted in the specific case of the Florain, a complementary local currency (CLC) in the Nancy metropolitan area, highlights four main user profiles: political activists, gentrifiers, casual users, and cultural users. This result leads us to describe the Florain user community as a polymerized monetary community, a finding that has many implications from both a socio-cultural and marketing perspective. And in order to consolidate the knowledge of the profiles of individual CLC users, the results were submitted to other complementary local currencies in the Grand Est region (Le Stück in the Bas-Rhin and La Cigogne in the Haut-Rhin), which supported their relevance.

KEYWORDS:

complementary local currency, monetary community, polymerized monetary community, socio-cultural profile

1. INTRODUCTION

When it comes to complementary local currency (CLC), it is often the Eusko that comes to mind. This CLC was launched in January 2013 and circulates in 158 towns of the French Basque Country (Fois Duclerc and Lafuente-Sampietro, 2023). But, according to Blanc, Fare, and Lafuente-Sampietro (2022), CLCs appeared late in France compared to other countries around the world, such as Brazil, with the launch of the Abeille in Villeneuve-sur-Lot in 2010. The authors show that, over the past decade, however, we've seen a boom in CLCs in the country, to the point of counting more than 80 active schemes in 2019 compared with less than a dozen in 2010. France's SSE Act of July 31, 2014¹ has since given them a legal framework, defining them as payment vouchers complementary to official fiat currency (Euro), which can only circulate in a restricted geographical area and relate to only a small number of goods and services. Individuals and businesses that agree with the CLC's charter of values can then become users by exchanging euros for CLC vouchers (most often, one unit of local currency for one euro), bearing in mind that the conversion back is only possible for professionals with a small penalty. By construction, they are therefore potential social tools for transforming a local economy (Lafuente-Sampietro, 2023, 2024; Lung, 2022).

But CLCs are only a subset of social currencies, defined as "local devices that provide the necessary framework for the development of exchanges of services and goods between members of an ad hoc association, and which can be accounted for and paid for using an internal currency" (Blanc, 2009). In the taxonomy of social currencies proposed by Blanc (2011), CLCs are thus 3rd generation social currencies, which seek to compensate for the shortcomings - inconvertibility with legal tender, impossibility of integrating professionals, etc. - of 1st generation schemes, such as LETS (Local Exchange Trading Systems), and 2nd generation schemes, such as Time Banks or Accorderies² (Fare, 2011, 2012).

The question then arises as to the socio-cultural profiles of the users of these social currencies. Much of the literature has focused on 1st and 2nd generation currencies, whose main aim is to create social ties (Servet, 1999). Participants frequently present a precarious social (Laacher, 2003), professional or financial profile (Seyfang and Longhurst, 2013; Saiag, 2011). To our knowledge, however, there is little research on the socio-cultural profile of CLC users, which seems to be confirmed by an ADEME report³: "Little data exists on the social profiles of CLC users, making it impossible to draw up a typical portrait of the user".

In the absence of an overall view, we are therefore reduced to examining the work carried out on a particular CLC, as in the case of the Sol alpin (Fare, 2011, 2012), a local currency in the Grenoble area, where well-to-do, highly educated young people are over-represented. In the case of Galléco, a local currency circulating in Rennes, Redon, Fougères and the surrounding area, the profile of volunteers is concentrated mainly among middle and upper intellectual professions, with a very high level of education, mostly Master level or above (Jan, 2015). Concerning Gonette, a local citizen currency in the Lyon region, Rochette (2020) shows that it is established in several gentrified neighborhoods of Lyon and that its members tend to be young, often executives or self-employed, with several associative commitments. An internal study carried out at the end of 2016 by the association managing the Stück (local currency for Strasbourg's economic basin), one year after its launch, also shows that young executives and professionals are largely over-represented among users, while retirees and blue-collar workers are under-represented. Furthermore, in an interview⁴ with the news magazine *Le Point*, one of the co-presidents of the association "Une monnaie pour Paris" stated that La Pêche, a complementary and citizen currency created in Montreuil in 2014, had over 800 members, mainly upper socio-professional categories activists; the association even feared that local currencies would remain "a 'bobo'⁵ tool".

Finally, for the Eusko, the local currency of the French Basque Country, the identity dimension seems to be an important key to understanding participation in the local monetary⁶ scheme (Poveda, 2015), even if studies focus more on the amounts spent by users (Piriou, 2018) than on their socio-cultural profile.

Using a very broad definition, Blanc (2018, p. 5) defines a community as "a cohesive social space". This definition can easily be applied to users of a CLC. However, as we have just seen, users share a set of common values, which makes them become more than mere consumers: they become "engaged consumers" (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2018) who favor a certain mode of consumption, in line with the values contained in the CLC's charter of values. This community of users can therefore be defined as a "sociation" (Weber, 1922/2003, p. 78), in the sense that social relations between individuals are based on a compromise or alliance of interests rationally motivated by values. Note that the CLC's charter of values is the result of a bottom-up construction (Didier, 2023) which, contrary to the

traditional top-down approach where the association's management imposes its views on the lower hierarchical levels, favors starting from discussions between the members closest to the field in order to elaborate a value system shared by all. This leads to the establishment of solid trust among CLC members, making this membership association a monetary community (Blanc, 2018), within which the local currency enables interdependence between members that goes beyond mere market relationships, since reciprocity and redistribution, the basis of the Social Solidarity Economy, also develop (Hillenkamp and Laville, 2013; Gardin and Laville, 2017).

This raises the question of whether all users of a CLC necessarily have the same socio-cultural profile, which can be studied by analyzing individuals' social representations, defined as "a form of knowledge, socially constructed and shared, with a practical purpose and contributing to the construction of a reality common to a social group." (Jodelet, 2003, p. 53). To do so, in this article I will draw on the structural approach of Abric (2016) and Flament (2003), which focuses more on the content of representations and their dynamics. Knowing these profiles enables us to analyze how the collective is created, the values on which it is based, and the social project defended (Fare, 2011). The diversity or uniformity of these profiles also influences the type of governance required to coordinate them. This can also be interesting from a marketing perspective, since knowledge of these user profiles is likely to lead to a consumer segmentation. This is especially interesting given the growing importance of the LOHAS (Lifestyle of Health and Sustainability) consumers, characterized by a "devotion to sustainable consumption" (Szakály, Pető, Popp and Jasák, 2015).

That is why I propose to make a contribution to characterizing the socio-cultural profile of individual users of a complementary local currency, in the particular case of the Florain, a CLC in the Nancy catchment area created in 2017, for which I have a computerized survey conducted in 2019 supplemented by a series of interviews conducted between 2018 and 2020. My article is divided into three parts. The first characterizes the community of CLC users. The second presents the methodology and the results of my study concerning the socio-cultural profiles of Florain users. The last part analyzes the four typical user profiles that make up the polymerized monetary community of the Florain, and shows that the grid shown in Figure 6 of this article was deemed relevant by two other CLCs in the Grand Est region.

2. CHARACTERIZING THE CLC USER COMMUNITY

All the users of a complementary local currency form a collective, which can be analyzed, initially, through Weber's (1922/2003) concept of "sociation". But, with regard to the institutional nature of money (Aglietta et al., 2016), I will show that this sociation of individuals takes the particular form of a monetary community and that the latter can potentially be made up of different sociocultural profiles.

2.1. A sociation of individuals sharing common values

To characterize social relations between individuals, i.e. "the behavior of several individuals insofar as, by its significant content, the behavior of some is regulated by that of others and is oriented accordingly" (Weber, 1922/2003, p. 58), Max Weber distinguishes between "communalization" and "sociation" (ibid., p. 78), which can coexist within a group of individuals. The former characterizes social relations of reciprocity between individuals participating in social activity on the basis of a subjective feeling (traditional or affective, such as fraternity, piety or camaraderie) of common belonging. The second refers to reciprocal social relations between individuals participating in social activity on the basis of a compromise or alliance of interests rationally motivated in value or purpose. Thus, an association of individuals based on interests (economic or otherwise) or convictions is a sociation.

By definition, users of an CLC seek to cover part of their personal needs within the network of member professionals, who accept it as a means of payment. This coverage of economic needs, however, requires a change in consumption patterns, by "prioritizing local consumption through short, local, quality circuits". In this respect, CLC is a tool for resisting mass consumption and challenging its values (excessive competition, greed, etc.), in line with the theoretical critiques developed by the social sciences since the 1950s (Marcuse, 1968). In so doing, CLC users, who prior to joining were merely consumers separated from one another by market logic, become "engaged consumers" (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2018) reaffiliated with a collective, which can be qualified in Weberian terms as the sociation of CLC users. Within the latter, users therefore make a moral commitment to favor a certain mode of consumption, in line with the civic values contained in the CLC's charter of values.

I am now going to show that this sociation, when linked to a complementary local currency, takes on a particular form: the monetary community.

2.2. Local monetary community

Monetary institutionalism, including the work of Aglietta and Orléan (1998) and Théret (2008), enables us to study the community and institutional dimensions of money together. According to Théret (2008, p. 832), a “payment community” is “a society in which a set of means of payment articulated to an account system circulates”, the latter serving to set the rules for accounting and payment, while enabling debts and claims to be quantified. The payment community then constitutes “a totality that is included by the use of money in any transaction settled in money” (Blanc, 2018, p. 3).

The emergence of a payment community depends above all on trust in money, which in turn legitimizes the payment community. In this respect, Aglietta and Orléan (2002) distinguish three forms of growing trust in money: methodical trust, based on routine or tradition, in the sense that agents can see that private exchanges with this money are easy and that private debts can be settled; hierarchical trust, which stems from political authority and reveals money’s attribute of sovereignty; and ethical trust, which stems from a higher order and is based in particular on national symbols and values. Ethical trust is the basis of social belonging and community reproduction.

Based on these foundations, Théret (2008) associates the payment community with methodical trust and the account community with ethical trust, with the articulation of these two communities leading to a monetary order. For his part, Blanc (2018) shows that the values that underpin the community of users of a currency give a particular dimension to the payment community. Indeed, these values underpin the ethical dimension of trust, which tends to make the payment community a “monetary community” (ibid., p. 5). In other words, money is the social institution that makes it possible to create a community based on shared values, with no pre-existing foundations: the monetary community.

These results can easily be transposed to local currencies. Indeed, the value system of the sociation of CLC users is the result of a bottom-up construction which, contrary to the traditional top-down approach where the association’s management imposes its views on the lower hierarchical levels, favors starting from discussions between the members closest to the field in order to elaborate a value system shared by all. This helps create ethical trust, which complements methodical trust - resulting from the fact that CLC exchanges are repeated under the right conditions - and hierarchical trust - the fruit of the close link⁸ between the local currency unit and the Euro. In this way, the sociation of CLC users becomes a monetary community, within which the local currency enables interdependence between members that goes beyond mere market relationships, since reciprocity and redistribution, the basis of the Social Solidarity Economy, also develop (Hillenkamp and Laville, 2013; Gardin and Laville, 2017). With these values, the local monetary community creates its social identity on the territory wherein it operates (Lafuente-Sampietro, 2023) and differentiates itself externally without becoming isolated (Blanc, 2018).

The cohesion of the local monetary community is ensured by the combination of several forms of proximity, as defined by Blanc (2018, p.12): spatial, cognitive (sharing of common values or representations), relational (existence of social networks) and mediation (set of rules, norms and values that ensure relations and the smooth running of the community). The former is expressed by the idea of the catchment area, which immediately denotes a social construction of a CLC’s circulation space. Cognitive proximity, for its part, is based on the sharing of strong values, embodied at the very least in the published charter of values. Relational proximity is linked in particular to the existence of more or less developed social networks, which may originate in forms of activism practiced by members. Finally, mediation proximity refers, among other things, to the governance of the CLC’s management association. The quest for participatory governance often leads to the adoption of sociocracy (Didier, 2022), based on the cardinal principle of member equivalence (Romme and Endenburg, 2006).

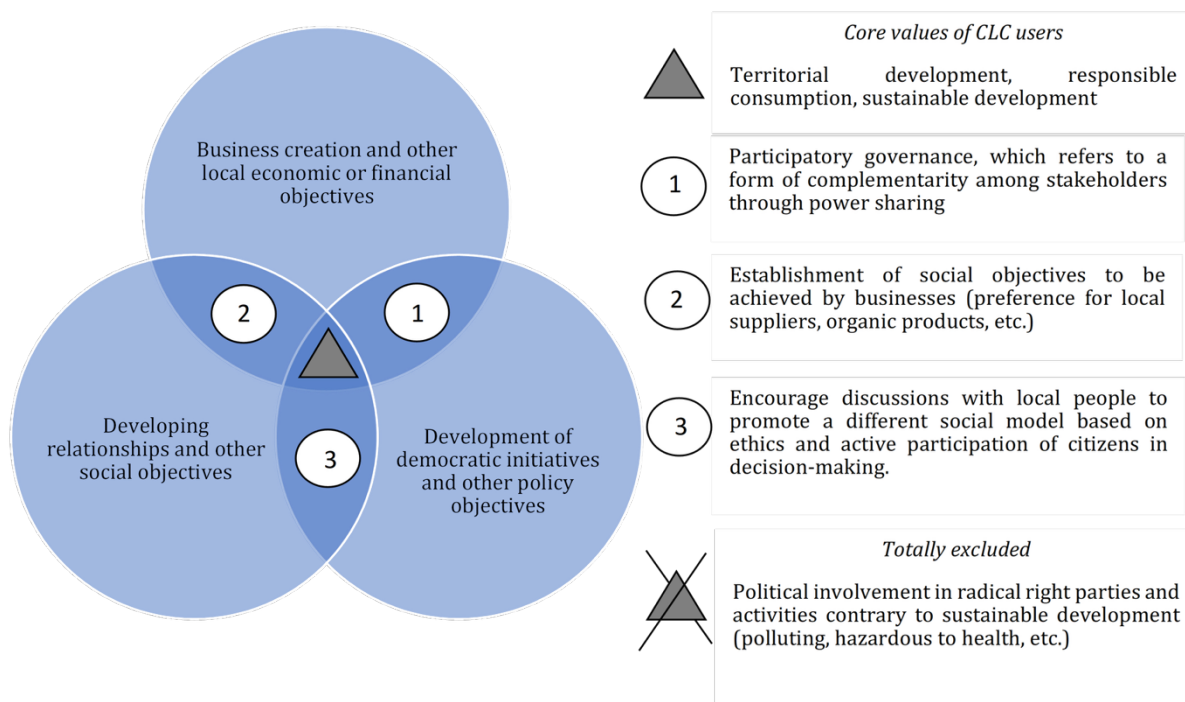
2.3. Potentially different socio-cultural profiles within a local monetary community

The potential existence of different socio-cultural profiles within the local monetary community can then be explained by individuals’ social representations. According to the structural approach of Abric (2016) and Flament (2003), of all the cognitive elements making up social representation, some play a dominant role in that they give meaning to and organize social representation: these cognitive elements are part of the central core. The other

elements, which by construction depend on the central core, make up the peripheral system and are used by individuals to figure out the social situations with which they are confronted.

While CLC users share a minimum set of very general common values, each is, of course, free to defend other values as an individual, as long as these remain compatible with the charter of values (hence the importance of drafting the charter in line with known or anticipated user profiles). They may therefore share the same hard core of social representations about money, but differ in their peripheral system, allowing “adaptation, differentiation according to lived experience, integration of everyday experiences”, i.e. individualized social representations (Abric, 2016, p.37). Hence potentially different socio-cultural profiles, which coexist within the local monetary community by means of adapted governance. Based on the literature concerning the social representations of users of a local currency (Fare and Ould Ahmed, 2017; Didier, 2022; Tichit, 2017), I illustrate in Figure 1 the values that very often appear in the central core.

Figure 1 – Core and peripheral values of CLC users



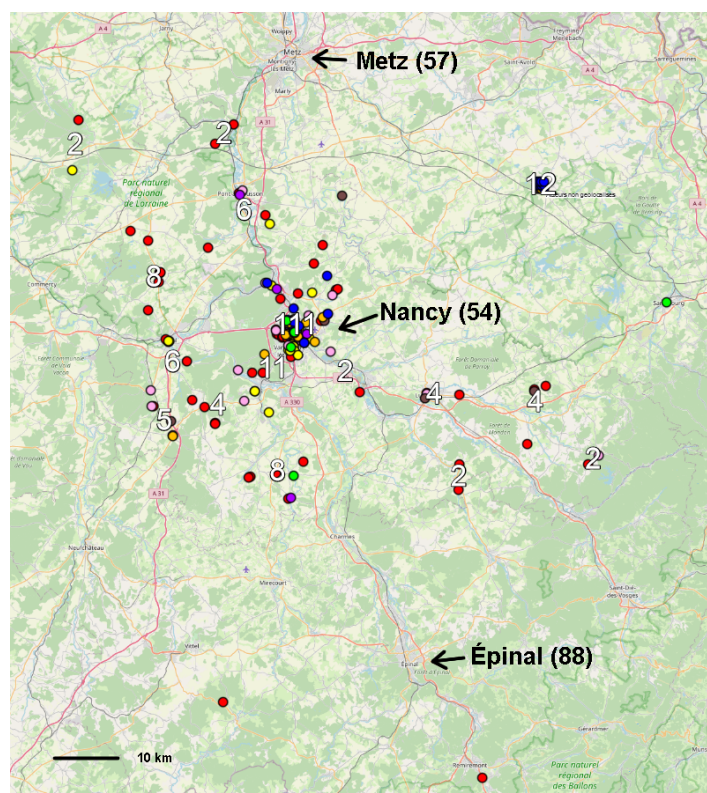
Source: Author

3. SOCIO-CULTURAL PROFILES OF FLORAIN USERS

The Florain was officially put into circulation in October 2017 by the Association Le Florain. At the date of my computerized survey in 2019, the articles of association specified that the CLC circulated in the Nancy area (Figure 2) and that the association's governance was participatory⁹. The former French administrative region called Lorraine was composed of 4 administrative departments: Moselle [57], Meurthe-et-Moselle [54], Meuse [55] and Vosges [88], even though the majority of businesses in 2019 and 2020 were located within a 40 km radius of the city of Nancy, the biggest town of the department of Meurthe-et-Moselle.

It was made up of associate members (individuals, businesses who accept the Florain as payment for their products or services) and non-adherent members (ex officio members) who were local authorities, financial backers contributing to the project, partner organizations or any other organization designated by the steering committee. The articles of association defined active members as the salaried employee, any interns and civic services, and active volunteers. In December 2019, the association announced 102,000 florains in circulation, only in paper form at that time¹⁰, 12 exchange counters, 195 professional service providers in the network and 531 individual members.

Figure 2 – Distribution businesses accepting the Florain in December 2019



Source: Le Florain website (December 2019), map completed with scale and geographical annotations

Figure 3 – The Florain vouchers



Source: Le Florain website

By particularizing the general theoretical results obtained in the first part, I deduce that Florain users form a local monetary community, not all of whose individuals necessarily have the same socio-cultural profile. On the basis of responses to my computerized survey conducted between July 16th and October 1st, 2019 (Appendix 1) and interviews with individual users, I therefore seek to characterize these different profiles.

3.1 Methodology of the survey

I observed human, social and economic relationships within the Florain monetary community, using an approach close to ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967). It is also similar to the participatory observation frequently found in community studies (Schrecker, 2006). However, in order to avoid “slipping from the status of non-participating observer to that of non-observing participant” (Whyte, 1984), I chose not to get involved in the association’s governing bodies, but to remain an active observer at the events (AGMs, discovery days...) organized.

From the outset, therefore, my work is rooted in a socio-cultural perspective, with the association managing a local currency as my field of study, which I studied using a survey approach. To this end, I conducted 10 interviews with individual members of the association, between the end of 2017 and the end of 2019. Essentially semi-structured, these interviews lasted an average of 80 minutes and enabled us to meet the salaried employee, founding members of the Association Le Florain, active volunteers and ordinary users, in a variety of locations. This qualitative data was then subjected to matrix processing to select significant material and verbatim (Huberman and Miles, 2003).

I wanted to enrich my results with a computerized survey, programmed with LimeSurvey software and conducted among Florain users, between July 16th and October 1st, 2019. Divided into 3 parts, it covered Florain usage (9 questions), perception of the Florain (maximum 5 questions) and Florain users (11 questions maximum). While many of the questions asked respondents to make a choice from among several suggested answers, others gave them the opportunity to express themselves freely through a text, or to classify words that came to mind when the concept of money was evoked.

87 people responded to the questionnaire, but only 65 declared themselves to be Association Le Florain members for 2019. Of the 65 people who declared themselves to be members in 2019, 57 answered all the questions put to them. As of December 31, 2019, Association Le Florain had 531 individual members. As I do not know their number at the end of the survey on October 1st, 2019, I calculate the lower bound of the response rate, which in any case seems close to that obtained by Fare (2011, 2012):

Table 1 – Lower bound of survey response rate

	n	Lower limit of response rate
Respondents with or without membership	87	$87 / 531 \approx 16,4 \%$
2019 member respondents	65	$65 / 531 \approx 12,2 \%$
Complete answers for 2019 members	57	$57 / 531 \approx 10,7 \%$

My study was conducted on the basis of 57 complete responses. I was aware of the limitations of this study, firstly because of the small number of respondents. There is, in fact, a reluctance to talk about money, as shown by studies in the psychology¹¹ of money (Furnham and Argyle, 2008), confirmed in part by work in the socio-cultural of money (Aldridge, 1998; De Blic and Lazarus, 2021), even if Zelizer (2005) asserts that during crises this taboo of monetary issues tends to weaken. In addition, the questionnaire was relatively long, and some questions were deemed difficult, such as the association of words linked to the money inductor. What's more, the responses are not immune to certain biases (Beaud and Weber, 2010), which are difficult to neutralize (Reio, 2007) within a small community (over-representation of certain profiles, lies, study participants different from nonrespondents etc.).

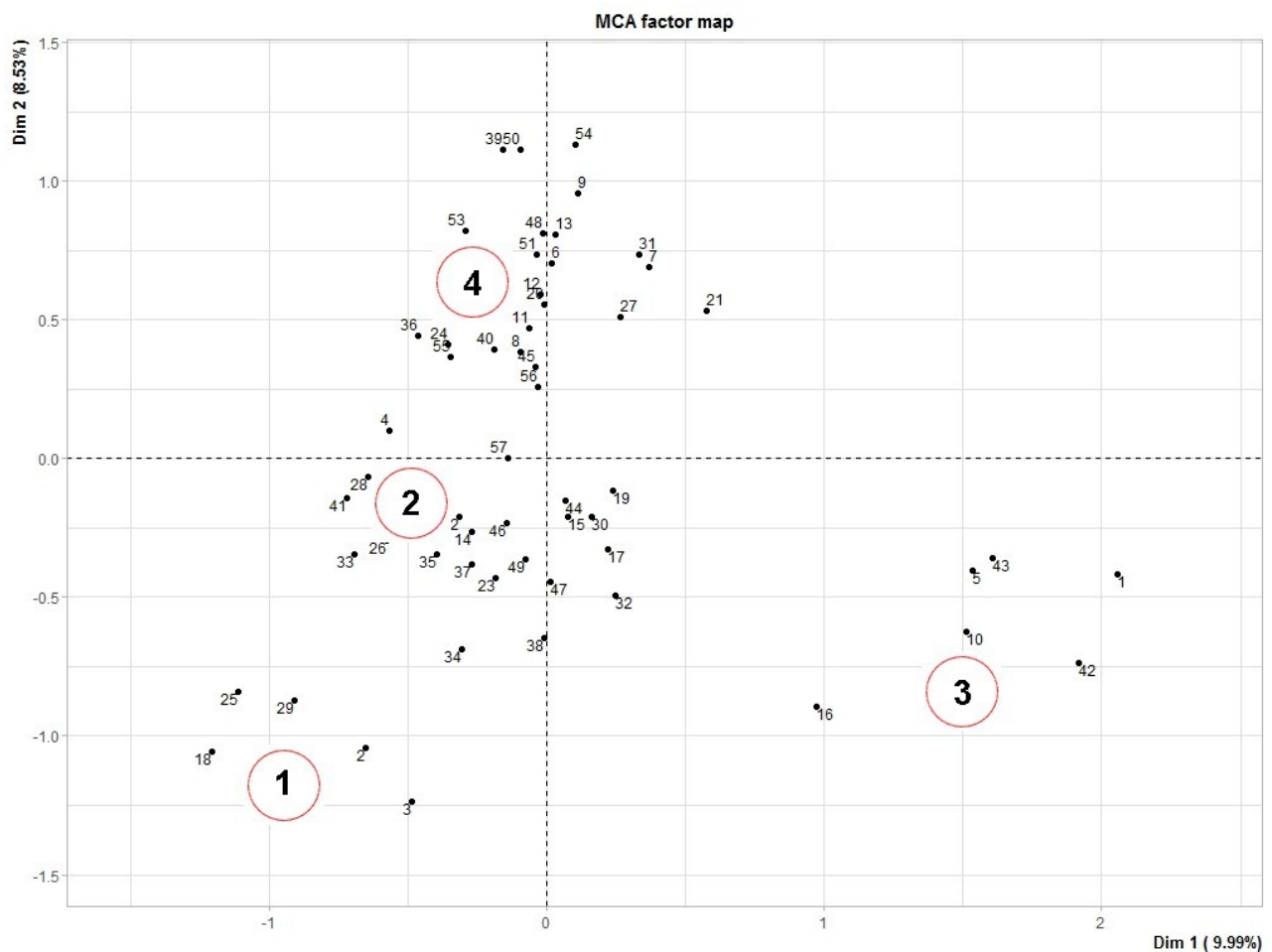
Despite its limitations, I wished to make use of the results of the computer survey, as it could be used to triangulate the data from the interviews and to study the profiles of individual CLC users more accurately. Therefore, I carried out a multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) on a larger number of factors, divided into 6 active variables and 4 illustrative signage variables, which I feel are relevant for characterizing users in a socio-cultural dimension. These 10 variables and their associated modalities (32 for the 6 active variables and 26 for the 4 illustrative variables) are

presented in Table 4 in the Appendix. A categorization has been made for the associations to which the respondents belong and the changes in their perception of the economy since using the Florain. In both cases, this categorization of responses also enabled rare modalities to be taken into account. As for the lack of response, this is not a problem, given the obligation to answer all questions (except one, not used in the MCA) and the fact that the study is carried out only on the 57 complete responses to the questionnaire.

3.2. Results of the Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA)

The MCA was carried out using R and the FactoMineR package¹². The results are presented in graphical form. Analysis of the cloud of individuals on the first two axes (Figure 4) shows that over 18.5% of inertia is explained in this way:

Figure 4 – The four clusters of individuals on the first two factorial axes



Source: Author, graph created with the FactoMineR package and completed to show the 4 MCA groups.

Specific groups of individuals emerge quite clearly, which I have labelled 1, 2, 3 and 4 in Figure 4. A graphical examination of the modalities of the MCA's active and illustrative variables on the first two axes reveals certain characteristics of the four groups. The first axis thus contrasts, on the right, people who do not comment on their status within the Association Le Florain and declare that they do not know whether using Florain changes their perception of the economy with people, and on the left of the axis, people who clearly describe the change induced by Florain in their perception of the economy. The second axis contrasts individuals who spend a lot of florains (bottom) and are members of several associations, with individuals who spend few (top) and are members of few associations. The representation of the illustrative modalities alone brings out some additional information on the characterization of the groups identified in Figure 4, particularly with regard to the highest qualification obtained by individuals and their job.

Finally, as the number of individuals was not very high, I completed the characterization of the groups shown in Figure 4 by a direct study of the individuals' modalities.

Group 1 is made up of rather young individuals, who are members of a large number of associations (mainly ecological), declare themselves to be active members of the Association Le Florain and claim that using the Florain has raised their awareness of the values associated with money.

Group 2 is made up of highly-educated individuals, often in managerial positions, spending a lot of florains on average, who say they are not active members of the Association Le Florain, but feel a strong sense of belonging to the Florain monetary community, especially as the CLC has changed their view of the economy in terms of the importance of local development and the values associated with the currency.

Group 3 is made up of individuals who don't belong to any other association than the Association Le Florain, who on average don't express a very strong sense of belonging to the Florain monetary community, who say they don't know whether the Florain has really changed their perception of the economy, and who, if they don't know, say they're not active members of the Florain monetary community.

Group 4 is made up of individuals who are often highly educated, rather young, but most often only have intermediate level jobs (clerks, technicians, etc.), spend relatively few florains, express a strong sense of belonging to the Florain monetary community, but declare that they are not active members of the Association Le Florain. In their view, the CLC has strengthened their desire to develop the area by changing consumption patterns and the values associated with money.

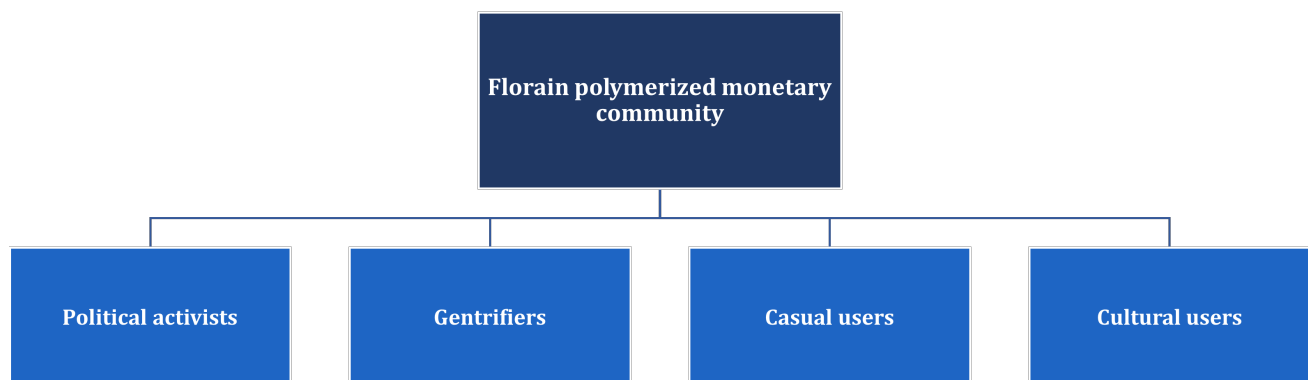
4. THE POLYMERIZED MONETARY COMMUNITY

In this section, we'll take a closer look at the four individual user groups, which I believe correspond to four typical user profiles in the case of the Florain: political activists, gentrifiers, casual users, and cultural users. Coordinated, they form the polymerized Florain monetary community.

4.1. Four typical user profiles in the case of Florain

I call the Florain community of individual users a polymerized monetary community (Figure 5), insofar as its existence requires - as in the chemical process of polymerization - the coordinated combination of monomers (these four profiles) using a specific method, in this case an adapted form of governance, sociocracy. Sociocratic governance develops an organic conception close to biology, in that it will give all the components of an organization the possibility of exercising power over the management of the whole, based on 4 main rules: the creation of circles, decision by consent, elections without candidates, and the double link between circles (Endenburg, 1998b; Rau, 2023). In this way, power "is under the authority of the organization as an organic entity" (Buck and Endenburg, 2004, p. 2), creating a strong sense of motivation and belonging to the group. This has enabled the Association Le Florain to adopt a bottom-up value system, generating trust, buy-in and involvement among members, as well as organizational resilience in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic (Carbonnel and Didier, 2022; Didier, 2023).

Figure 5 – The 4 typical user profiles in the Florain polymerized local monetary community



Source: Author

4.1.1. Political activists

These users correspond to profile 1 in Figure 4. The creation of such a user profile is directly linked to the genesis of the Florain. Indeed, the project for a CLC in the Nancy basin has its origins in the Alternatiba Nancy fair, which was held in Nancy on June 13 and 14, 2015. Alternatiba (“Alternative”, in Basque) is a citizen’s movement for mobilization on climate disruption created in 2013 in Bayonne, which claims a desire to set in motion as quickly as possible “the social, energy and ecological transition” by promoting alternatives “that create jobs, bring about a more human, convivial and united world¹³”.

Several founding members of the Association Le Florain took part in this fair in 2015, notably by getting involved in the organization of an exhibition on local currencies. Today, these early adopters of the CLC form the core of the Association Le Florain’s active volunteers, and my interviews revealed that they very often also had significant activist experience: trade unionism, political movements/parties, ecological associative movements. During the interviews after the launch of Florain in 2017, some of these volunteers told me that they had become involved in the local currency project precisely to bring about a profound change in the values held by the capitalist system and regain control over money creation. For example, Michel, an active volunteer, believes that “local currency should help build a fairer, more united society.”¹⁴

The activist commitment of these users also explains why, in 2020, Association Le Florain’s¹⁵ premises will be transferred to the same location as those of an ecological association set up by active Association Le Florain volunteers. These issues of environmental preservation, local development and social justice, which form the basis of the CLC project in Nancy and today of Association Le Florain’s charter of values¹⁶, are also shared by other CLCs in France (Lafuente-Sampietro, 2023; Blanc, Fare and Lafuente-Sampietro, 2022).

Beyond their obvious spatial proximity, there is an affective closeness between them, which regularly prompts them to meet in a less formal setting than that of associative bodies, generally at the home of a professional Association Le Florain member. This tends to show that the members of this hard core of active volunteers have more reciprocal relationships than those from other profiles, making these Florain users a specific group that can be likened to an “identity niche” (Ion, 1997, p. 53). More precisely, it is a “private we” (Ion, 1997, p. 91), which is able to describe the communalization formed by active volunteers within the local Florain monetary community. These members display a strong sense of belonging to the community, close to camaraderie, which emerges explicitly from my interviews and seems to be reinforced by the use, in every meeting, of “Nonviolent Communication” (NVC)¹⁷ principles and a few basic hand signs borrowed from the Colibri movement¹⁸ to visually (rather than verbally) understand each participant’s position on the issue.

4.1.2. Gentrifiers

These users correspond to profile 2 in Figure 4. These users adopted the CLC after cultural users, making them an “early majority” from a marketing perspective (Matzler, Mooradian, Füller and Anschober, 2014). For these users, the Florain functions as a kind of social marker, capable of highlighting both their economic and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986), as well as certain values they hold dear, such as ecology. However, legal tender could enable them to achieve the same result, insofar as it is likely to be socially marked (Zelizer, 2005).

In a way, this group of users is similar to the “bobos” of journalists (Brooks, 2000), an expression that pejoratively designates people belonging to the most affluent socio-professional categories, living in large urban centres and whose political values are rather left-wing with a strong ecological sensibility. But the bobo as defined above remains a vague, even false concept (Clerval, 2005), in that it associates a well-defined social group, the bourgeoisie, which accumulates economic, political and cultural power, with a much more elusive group, the bohemian¹⁹, whose main characteristic is to challenge the bourgeois order. In any case, the use of this term “overlooks the heterogeneity of populations, the diversity of processes and practices” (Authier et al., 2018, p. 14), which makes it problematic from a scientific point of view.

It would therefore be more appropriate to speak of gentrification (Glass, 1964), a process of social transformation of a city involving the transformation of housing, shops, or public spaces. This social transformation is characterized by a material and symbolic transformation of the area and, often, is also characterized by the appropriation of a popular space by social groups generally from the middle and upper classes. Therefore, I define in this article

gentrifiers as people wishing to display their social differentiation in the neighbourhood through their lifestyle and consumption habits, as well as their left-leaning green political commitment. For these gentrifiers, the CLC has consequently a particular resonance with their desire for social differentiation. In effect, it offers them the possibility of identifying themselves as members of a monetary community created on values that are in part antinomic to those of the national monetary community, without calling into question the capitalist system that reinforces their social status. For example, Claire, a user who identifies herself in this category, stated that “using a local currency requires knowledge that higher socioeconomic groups are more likely to possess.”

4.1.3. Casual users

These users correspond to profile 3 in Figure 4. Their profile suggests that they are simple users of the local currency, with little concern for associative, political or social commitments. They often adopted the currency much later than the activists and the cultural users. From a marketing perspective, they are called laggards. Their only proximity to other Florain users is spatial (the Florain circulation territory), which obviously isn't enough to build a sense of belonging to a monetary community, but this objective doesn't seem to be what they're looking for. For them, local currency seems to be just another face of legal tender, with no additional commitments or values. Although they are signatories to the charter of values, there is still some doubt as to the values to which they adhere. Pierre, a casual user, described his experience as a simple user of Florain as follows: “I'm somewhat interested in local currency, but I don't have time to devote to it. I think for me it was just a desire to try something new, but nothing more.”

In so doing, they are potentially the most likely to abandon the scheme, particularly if the number of professionals accepting the Florain seems insufficient, especially as saving is by definition not an option, nor is conversion, due to French law on CLCs. In any case, their financial participation in the scheme increases the number of members and, to a certain extent at least, establishes the CLC's credibility in the eyes of professionals who want to find a solvent demand.

This type of profile is made possible by the mode of governance of these associative currencies (Didier 2022; Carbonnel and Didier, 2022), which very often relies on a core group of very active volunteers (and sometimes a few salaried employees) who take on the major management functions of the CLC (administrative management, replenishment of exchange counters, management of working groups on each project, convening of various governance bodies...). As a result, users may not be involved in the governance of the CLC, as seems to be evidenced by the very low attendance²⁰ of Florain users at the Association Le Florain Annual General Meeting, a key moment in the life of the association.

4.1.4. Cultural users

These users, who adopted the Florain at almost the same stage as the gentrifiers, correspond to profile 4 in Figure 4. These members would therefore have sufficient cultural capital to understand the workings of the economy (Bourdieu, 1979a, 1986), and in some cases compensate for an accepted or even chosen lack of economic capital.

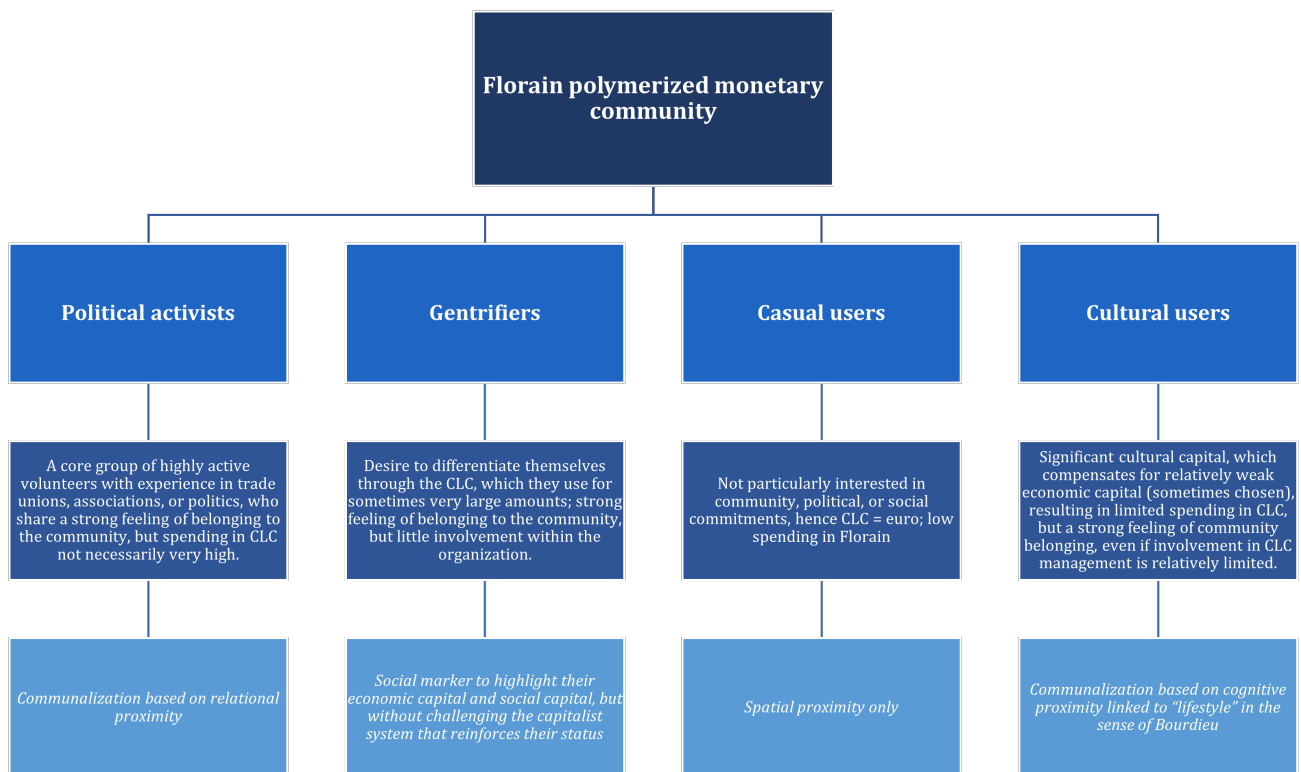
This was quite clear from my interviews: while one regular Florain user explained that she had “chosen a sober but fulfilling life”, one of the founding members pointed out that “the over-representation of highly educated people can be explained by the desire of some Florain users to switch to a life where they will work less and live better”.

I can thus speak of a communalization of the “cultural ones” based mainly on this cognitive proximity with other users wishing to give priority to cultural capital over economic capital (unlike gentrifiers), a “lifestyle” in the sense that Bourdieu²¹ gives to the word (Bourdieu, 1979b, p. 190) that they would like to see generalized within the Florain community.

As for the political activists, the relationships between cultural users make them a specific group, which can be likened to an “identity niche” (Ion, 1997, p. 53).

I summarize my analysis of the socio-cultural profiles of Florain users in 2019 in Figure 6.

Figure 6 – Four typical user profiles in the Florain polymerized monetary community



Source: Author

4.2. Relevance of the four typical user profiles

In June 2023, I resubmitted my analysis of the four profiles (Figure 6) to the members of the Association Le Florain steering committee, who confirmed its relevance after the COVID-19 pandemic, in the face of which the organization had also demonstrated great organizational resilience (Didier, 2023).

In order to consolidate my knowledge of the profile of individual CLC users, I submitted this grid to two other complementary local currencies in the Grand Est region, located in Alsace. I did not influence their response, simply asking them to study my grid with their members, making it clear that it was based on a study of Florain and could therefore prove inadequate in their case. Moreover, during other contacts concerning governance more specifically, they never hesitated to tell me frankly the points on which they disagreed.

It should be noted (Figure 7) that the Grand Est region was created on January 1, 2016, through the merger of the former administrative regions of Alsace (2 departments: Bas-Rhin and Haut-Rhin), Champagne-Ardenne (4 departments: Ardennes, Aube, Marne and Haute-Marne), and Lorraine (4 departments: Moselle, Meurthe-et-Moselle, Meuse and Vosges).

Figure 7 – The Grand Est region



Source: Oie blanche. Alsace-Champagne-Ardenne-Lorraine et provinces. 2016. Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alsace-Champagne-Ardenne-Lorraine_et_provinces.svg. Licence CC BY-SA 4.0.

The three CLCs, two in Alsace (Le Stück, la Cigogne) and one in Lorraine (le Florain), are comparable in size according to the synthetic size indicator²² developed by Blanc, Fare, Lafuente-Sampietro (2020).

Table 3 - Assessment of the relevance of my user profile analysis grid by members of other CLCs

CLC name	Catchment area	Verbatim
Florain	Southern Meurthe-et-Moselle: Nancy, Lunéville, Pont-à-Mousson, Toul and all surrounding towns and countryside	"We're not in touch with all our members. However, this typology doesn't seem any less relevant to us than when you presented it to us. [...] There are certainly more 'politically committed' and more 'cultural' than 'gentrifiers'."
Stück	Bas-Rhin: Strasbourg, Schiltigheim, Eckbolsheim, Molsheim, Obernai, Sélestat...	"These 4 profiles seem to me to fit well with the general population of climate walks. [...] I know at least one of each profile, I'd say. And the 'climate walks' community is the first circle that we're gradually trying to integrate. [...] So I think these 4 profiles represent all the users."
La Cigogne	Haut-Rhin: Mulhouse, Colmar, Saint-Louis...	"Your 4 profiles seem relevant to me, even if the differences between the 'politically committed' and the 'cultural' seem tenuous. Gentrifiers are those who keep a CLC running, but they're few and far between in general, and simple users, while real, seem to me negligible in the equation because they're not of the profile to commit or re-adhere from one year to the next."

Source: Author

Finally, after several weeks of intense discussions among members, my grid was deemed relevant by the three CLCs, even if the socio-cultural profiles had not yet been studied in detail, which prevents them from providing us with a

weighting. But it seems that, in the three cases studied, the “casual users” profile is in the extreme minority, unlike the “political activists” and the “cultural users”, who are in a way the defenders of the CLC’s values (Table 3).

5. CONCLUSION

In this article, I have shown that users of a complementary local currency (CLC) form a local monetary community, within which the CLC enables interdependence between members that goes beyond mere market relationships, since relationships of reciprocity and redistribution also develop. Using the results of a Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) on a larger number of factors, I highlight four typical individual user profiles: political activists, gentrifiers, casual users and cultural users. The diversity of these user profiles makes their association within the Florain community more complex. In particular, it requires promoting values that are broad enough not to exclude anyone, and defending a project that must be perceived as more social than activist. The coordination of these four profiles through a sociocratic governance is called a local polymerized monetary community.

Despite the main limitations of my study (small number of respondents, concentration on a single CLC, biases...), my results should be seen as an additional step in the study of the profiles of individual CLC users, both from a socio-cultural and marketing perspective, since such a breakdown into profiles can easily lead to a consumer segmentation. Szakály, Pető, Popp and Jasák (2015) have indeed demonstrated the economic importance of the LOHAS (Lifestyle of Health and Sustainability) consumer segment, which is characterized by a “devotion to sustainable consumption” based on five values: authentic values, health-related values, ethical values, individualistic values, and values related to environmental awareness. It is therefore important to know that within the Florain community, some users have this type of consumption profile. We have also seen that while political activists and cultural users were the first to adopt the Florain, gentrifiers quickly followed. Casual users, on the other hand, often adopted the currency much later than activists and cultural users; they are “laggards”. However, the latter should not be overlooked, as their financial participation in the scheme increases the number of members and, to a certain extent at least, establishes the CLC’s credibility in the eyes of professionals anxious to find a solvent demand. And from a marketing perspective, Matzler, Mooradian, Füller and Anschober (2014) have shown that if the offering can be sufficiently adapted to these users, it can lead to growth opportunities for businesses within the Florain network.

This work could thus serve as a basis for other studies concerning users of local currencies, especially since my profiles were deemed relevant by two other CLCs in the Grand Est region: the Stück and the Cigogne. Admittedly, these three CLCs circulate in different geographical areas (one department of Lorraine for the Florain and the two departments of Alsace for the others), but the fact remains that their catchment areas are not disjointed in their historical and cultural dimensions. It would therefore be interesting to carry out the same in-depth survey for these two CLCs. And, at a later stage, to continue this work with other CLCs, outside the Grand Est region, to find out whether this partitioning of users remains relevant in catchment areas with different social dimensions.

ENDNOTES

1 Law No. 2014-344 of March 17, 2014, relating to consumption. Text available at this address: <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000028738036>

2 An *Accorderie* is a non-profit association created under the French law of 1901 that allows residents to exchange services based on a time currency

3 *Complementary environmental local currencies*, March 2016, p. 18.

4 Interview available at: https://www.lepoint.fr/economie/la-peche-une-nouvelle-monnaie-pour-paris-10-05-2018-2217408_28.php

5 According to Brooks (2000), “Bobo” is a pejorative term used to refer to people belonging to the most affluent socio-professional categories, living in large urban centers and whose political values are rather left-wing with a strong ecological sensibility.

6 Poveda (2015, p. 93) asserts that “the close relationship that users operate between the idea of the Basque Country and the dimension of identity constitutes a resource for the alternative action that Euskal Moneta has been able to mobilize.”

7 Preamble of the Manifesto for Citizen Complementary Local Currencies (MLCC) drafted by the MLCC network in 2010.

8 The managing association is obliged to deposit the euro counterparty in a reserve fund.

9 Although the term is not used in the articles of association, the extremely detailed description of governance shows that this is a sociocracy.

10 Since October 2022, the Digital Florain has been a means of payment, in addition to CLC vouchers, that allows users to make digital payments in Florains using a personal online account accessible via phone or computer.

11 According to Furnham and Argyle (2008): "Yet it still remains true that the psychology of money has been neglected. There may be various reasons for this. Money remains a taboo topic. Whereas sex and death have been removed from both the social and the research taboo list in many Western countries, money is still a topic that appears to be impolite to discuss and debate."

12 It was developed by François Husson, Julie Josse, Sébastien Lè of Agrocampus Rennes, and J. Mazet.

13 Alternatiba Charter available at <https://alternatiba.eu/charte-des-alternatiba/>

14 The entire study was conducted in French, which is why the translations were done by the author.

15 A founding member of both associations told us: "We preferred to pay rent to an association that is even closer to our hearts."

16 Florain's Charter of Values is available at <https://www.monnaie-localenancy.fr/comprendre/>

17 "Nonviolent Communication" (NVC) - officially registered under this spelling - is a communication method formalized by clinical psychologist Marshall B. Rosenberg. It offers simple principles for communicating with others in a way that is both honest and kind

18 The website of this French association (<https://www.colibris-lemouvement.org>) states that the Colibris Movement was "created in 2007 under the impetus of Pierre Rabhi and a few close friends." It aims to be "a citizens' movement working towards the emergence of a radically different, ecological and solidarity-based society by encouraging individual and collective action [...] based on the values of happy sobriety, cooperation and respect for life."

19 Historically, bohemianism brought together 19th-century artists such as Nerval and Rimbaud, and was characterized by a rejection of the bourgeois way of life and its aesthetics.

20 At the 2019 AGM, only 47 paid-up members were present: 11 members of the operational team, 8 members of the provider college, 28 members of the user college.

21 "The practices engendered by the various habitus present themselves as systematic configurations of properties expressing the differences objectively inscribed in the conditions of existence in the form of systems of differential deviations which, perceived by agents endowed with the perception and appreciation schemas necessary to identify, interpret and evaluate the relevant features, function as lifestyles."

22 This indicator is calculated as follows: $S = M \times (P + U)$, with S the synthetic indicator, M the mass of local currency in circulation, P the number of service providers accepting local currency and U the number of individual users. On the basis of this synthetic size indicator, local currencies are classified into 5 groups: cluster 1 (confidential circulation), cluster 2 (small size), cluster 3 (medium size), cluster 4 (large size), cluster 5 (very large size). The three CLCs studied belong to cluster 3.

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APPENDIX*Table 4 - Variables selected for the MCA*

Active variables	Terms and conditions	Illustrative variables	Terms and conditions
Average monthly expenditure in Florains	Nothing, Less than 5 Florains, 5 to 10 Florains, 10 to 20 Florains, 20 to 50 Florains, 50 to 100 Florains, 100 to 500 Florains, More than 500 Florains	Type	Man Woman
Number of associations [other than Florain] to which the CLC user belongs	1; 2; 3; 4; 5 or more	Age	Under 18; 18-25; 26-35; 36-45; 46-55; 56-65; 66 or over
Main type of association	Categorizing answers: none, bio, ecology, animal protection, cultural, support	Highest diploma obtained	No diploma [self-taught] Primary school certificate CAP/BEP Baccalaureate BTS/DUT/DEUG or other Bac+2 diploma Bachelor's degree or other diploma (bac+3) Master's degree or other diploma (bac+4) Master/DEA/DESS/Engineer or other diploma (bac+5) PhD/PhD
Change in perception of the economy since using Florain	Categorizing answers: importance of local development, values linked to money, consumption patterns, I don't know, none at all.	Current occupation	Looking for work Student Worker Employee Technician Supervisor or middle management Engineer or executive Retired
Active member of Le Florain	Yes, No, Don't know		
Sense of community when using Florain (1 strongly disagree, 5 strongly agree)	1 ; 2 ; 3 ; 4 ; 5		

Source: Author



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