

UNRISD Conference
Potential and Limits of Social and Solidarity Economy

SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY BETWEEN EMANCIPATION AND REPRODUCTION

Joana Soares Marques
University of São Paulo



UNITED NATIONS RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT
Geneva, May 2013

SUMMARY

- **Conceptualizing Social and Solidarity economy (SSE)**
- **Comparative outlook of SSE in Brazil and Portugal**
- **Theoretical problem: *Addressing state and market failures? Alternative model to current neoliberal development patterns? Another facet of contemporary capitalism?***
 - SSE and the production of welfare
 - SSE and global capitalism
 - SSE and work relations
- **Main goal:**
 - Questioning whether SSE is an emancipatory alternative or a product and instrument of the capitalist system, contributing to its reproduction.

CONCEPT OF SSE

- SSE is not something new, but the context of growing contradictions in the capitalist system opens up the space for different theories and experiences that proclaim SSE as a pathway for a more equal and sustainable society
- Relates to another component of social life, which is neither the business sector nor the public one
- Response to a “new social issue”: flexibility, precariousness, unemployment, the worsening of poverty and social exclusion situations
- Economic activities based on a collective patrimony and cooperation
- Autonomy and Democratic decision-making processes

3

CONCEPT OF SSE

- Satisfaction of collective purposes
- New symbolic features (environment, culture, citizenship...)
- There may be profit, but it should be reinvested for collective purposes
- No consensual terminology.



4

SSE IN PORTUGAL

- Southern European country, in the semi-periphery of the world-system, with a fragile welfare state
- Second world's cooperative law (1867)
- SSE dominated by welfare services (*IPSS, CERCI, Misericórdias...*)
- Attempts to establish an holistic concept of SSE, combining economic, social, cultural, environmental, territorial, scientific, management and political dimensions → holistic and integrated development model
- Main protagonists: communities, and their support networks (social assistants, development agents, Local Development Associations).
- Bill on social economy (2013) and Satellite Accounts of Social Economy (2010)

5

SSE IN BRAZIL

- Alternative to the social and work relations of capitalism
 - Large number of associative experiences organized by workers, farmers, consumers...
 - Experiences of bankrupt companies recovered by workers;
 - Formal or informal community groups and associations;
 - Solidarity finance.
- Widespread use of the concept of solidarity economy
- The main focus is on the production sphere
- The main protagonists of social and solidarity economy are the workers, with the support of Unions and Labor movements, NGOs and the state (National Secretariat of Solidarity Economy)
- Dominated by "Fight against unemployment"
- But also initiatives that use the form of solidarity economy with the objective of lowering costs, acting as sub-contractor for private companies or as providers of public services.

6

PRODUCTION OF WELFARE

- **Two main roles of SSE considering the production of welfare** (Esping-Andersen 1990, 1999):
 - The outsourcing of welfare policies to SSE organizations, regulated and partially financed by the state;
 - SSE initiatives centered in the economic activity, which operate in the market and are exposed to its rules.
- **Two conflicting movements drawing on the notion of (de)commodification:**
 - SSE extends social rights to certain individuals independently of their market participation in the sense of de-commodification;
 - BUT it also commodifies certain segments by allowing capital expansion to sectors that were outside the market, such as community groups and associations.

7

GLOBAL CAPITALISM

- **The current hegemonic global regime is neoliberalism, in which the rights of capital are the most important foundation of economic and political power** (Evans 2008)
- **“Central countries” tend to be a sphere of dominance and reproduction, while “peripheral countries” tend to be more resistant and counter-hegemonic** (Wallerstein 1979, 1984)
- **SSE in Brazil has emerged from a periphery setting, occupying a counter-hegemonic space, in resistance against the dominant political, economic and cultural powers, while in Portugal, in its semi-periphery, it is complementary to such powers.**
- ***How will the rise of Brazil and its new geo-political-economic centrality, and the economic recession of Portugal, and the consequent implementation of severe spending cuts, transform the dynamics of SSE?***

8

WORK RELATIONS AND SSE

- **Capitalist work relations are characterized by inequality and precariousness**
- **SSE has the advantage of being based on the workers self-management, autonomy and collective ownership → But on the ground these are not unproblematic concepts:**
 - Initiatives that do not provide suitable conditions of social protection for its workers and reproduce the asymmetric relations of capitalism
 - The transfer of public welfare to social and solidarity economy organizations means, to some extent, a loss in the social rights achieved from decades of working class struggles, turned into private and segmented services
 - Establishment of a new ideology of (collective) entrepreneurship and self-accountability, which, to some extent, legitimates the capitalist mode of production, exchange and consumption

9

EMANCIPATION VS REPRODUCTION

- **Social and solidarity economy, in Portugal and Brazil, faces a struggle between its project of social emancipation and the dominant social patterns to which it adapts, thus contributing to its reproduction**
- **Even emancipatory projects contain elements of reproduction (Bourdieu, 1977)**
- **Development of SSE in three ways :**
 - Market oriented - for lowering production costs, provision of public services, and/or fight against unemployment of the surplus workers without an educational and political project
 - Development of SSE as an approach for the delivery of welfare or a methodology of local development
 - Grass-roots initiatives that embody a conscious *project of social transformation* - idealization, but with a practical proposal and commitment toward a collective project.

10

THANK YOU ALL

joana.marques@usp.br

