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

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.
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)

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.
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.

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?
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

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.
THANK YOU ALL

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