Practicing Solidarity for the Future

Solidarity Economy from the Perspective of Social Sciences and Humanities

Edited by Olga Orlić and Mirna Jernej Pulić

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Solidarity Economy from the Perspective of Social Sciences and Humanities

Edited volume

Practicing Solidarity for the Future: Solidarity Economy from the Perspective of Social Sciences and Humanities

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Damir Marjanović, Director
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Editors:

Olga Orlić
Mirna Jernej Pulić

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Foreword

Interest in solidarity economy practices and initiatives has significantly increased following the economic crisis in 2008, when many people personally experienced inequality and injustice, generated by the contemporary capitalist system. While certain similar practices have already been established and known to researchers (Laville 2010), during and after the crisis there was a proliferation of new initiatives "from below", aimed at achieving sustainability and fairness. Their goal was not only to alleviate the negative effects of capitalist structures and practices, but also to create and sustain economic alternatives to capitalism (Kawano et al 2009). However, recent times have brought some new and a lot of old problems on the agenda. Climate change, conflicts, poverty, food insecurity and other negative influences (like the Covid-19 pandemic) continued affecting humans and all other living beings, as well as our planet, forcing people to continue developing various strategies for coping with these challenges and uncertainties.

The social and solidarity economy comprises an array of very diverse initiatives and movements focused on creating and practicing alternative ways of living, producing and consuming and thus also on transforming the dominant economic system, fighting global inequality and developing economic activities in a way that has benefited both people and the planet. This includes practices such as communal living, communal kitchens, workers' co-operatives, urban gardening, community-assisted agriculture, eco villages, ethical financing, alternative currencies, LETS, fair-trade initiatives and others. The broad, heterogeneous and growing body of research on the social and solidarity economy has built important links between the complex field of academia and the social and economic influence that the researched phenomenon itself have effectuated.

The edited volume "Practicing Solidarity for the Future: Solidarity Economy from the Perspective of Social Sciences and Humanities" is one of the deliverables of the project "Solidarity Economy in Croatia: Anthropological Perspective" (SOLIDARan, 2020-2024), funded by the Croatian Science Foundation (HRZZ). By including an anthropological perspective and a diachronic view of the conceptualization of solidarity in the presocialist, socialist and postsocialist period, the project "Solidarity Economy in Croatia: Anthropological Perspective" wishes to contribute to the theoretical consideration of the important anthropological concepts of solidarity, reciprocity and communities, as well as to understanding solidarity economy practices in the specific Croatian context. The central research questions regard the different and often mutually exclusive conceptualizations of solidarity in the contemporary moment, new forms of communities of practice and new ways of imagining communities, as well as perceptions of the solidarity economy as a way of creating a utopia of reconstruction.

The edited volume "Practicing Solidarity for the Future: Solidarity Economy from the Perspective of Social Sciences and Humanities" includes various themes and topics that were presented at the project international conference "Practicing Solidartiy for the Future", held in Zagreb

(Croatia) from 14 – 16 September 2022. The papers presented in the volume cover topics dealing with theoretical and applied research, diachronic and historical perspectives of solidarity, gendered approach to solidarity economy, social enterprises, cooperatives and community-led initiatives promoting solidarity, social entrepreneurship education, common-pool resources, and various others. In this vein, the volume is not only an important milestone of the project "Solidarity Economy in Croatia: Anthropological Perspective", but also the result of research and reflections of scholars from diverse disciplines (especially in the social sciences and humanities), who engage in theoretical and applied research, discussion and collaboration on the topic.

Exploring 'solidarity'. Ambivalences and challenges of an overexploited term

Cristina Grasseni

Leiden University

Introduction

Building on ongoing ethnographic research on food heritage and so-called 'food citizenship' in Europe, as well as drawing on the comparative ethnographic framework of the *Food Citizens?* project, this chapter proposes a critical exploration of 'solidarity' as a socio-anthropological notion in solidarity economy and collective food procurement in particular.

Collective food procurement comprises initiatives that aim - in diverse and even conflicting manners - at achieving sustainability, social inclusion, and a fairer circulation of food, addressing for example issues of pollution, labour exploitation, food miles and food's ecological footprint, as well as the downsides of intensive agriculture, capital monopoly over the global food system, etc. As such, collective food procurement falls under the rubric of social and solidarity economy networks. Solidarity works here as an underlying preoccupation that places diverse practices and projects within a common framework, but it is also an ideological commitment.

In their daily practice, initiatives such as community gardening, direct food provisioning from local farmers, or food waste recuperation and redistribution, aim not (only) at changing the global food system, but at addressing and alleviating social, relational, and psychological unease. Often, self-improvement or self-betterment goals deliver socially appreciable results, for example through socialisation in community gardens. But whether and how this happens depends on context, histories, habits, and cultural meanings which are associated with each specific initiative, and necessarily rooted in place and positioned vis-à-vis local movements, societal debates and challenges (including competing visions on solidarity). I will attempt to clarify the complex and

sometimes ambivalent undertones of multiple types of solidarity emerging from mainly, but not exclusively, anthropological scholarship, with the goal of contributing to ongoing reflection and conceptualisations of social and solidarity economy and its practices in Europe's past, present and future.

I wish to show how solidarity works as an underlying preoccupation that places diverse practices and projects within a common framework, but also represents diverse, sometimes divergent, ideological commitments. I will underline three aspects: firstly, a brief contextualization of solidarity economy; secondly, my ethnographic observation of the convergence - although fragile and temporary - between food activists and heritage food producers; thirdly, a critical analysis of food citizenship followed by the exploration of solidarity in the comparative framework of the *Food Citizens?* project and i-doc. I will conclude clarifying some ambivalent undertones of the discourse and practice of solidarity in collective food procurement.

Is solidarity economy about 'sharing'?

In 2013, the United Nations Research Institute on Social Development (UNRISD) organized an important conference on the Potentials and Limits of Social and Solidarities Economies. According to the convener Peter Utting, social and solidarity economy (from now on SSE) "is fundamentally about reasserting social control or 'social power' (Wright 2010) over the economy, by giving primacy to social and environmental objectives above profits, emphasizing the place of ethics in economic activity and rethinking economic practice in terms of democratic self-management and active citizenship" (Utting 2015: 7). This is particularly necessary in the face of everyday financialization, namely the permeation of financial products and dependencies in every aspects of everyday and intimate relationships. For example, Erik Bähre, in his recent book on *Insurance and the Financialization of Kinship in South Africa* (2020) calls 'ironies of solidarity' the effects of large-scale and abstract forms of solidarities such as insurance on the daily lives and relationships of victims, relatives and heirs, showing how they in turn affect solidarities among family and neighbours. The solutions offered – for example to car crashes - often create new problems. Seeking solutions to those second-order problems keeps the circle of social change in motion under the hegemony of financialization.

Jean-Louis Laville (2015) maps the different stages of SSE: from early nineteenth-century democratic solidarity and associations of collective action; through late nineteenth-century 'philanthropic solidarity', which focused on poverty reduction through individual giving; to the resurgence of democratic solidarity in the early and mid-twentieth century, with public authorities tasked with social protection and market regulation. Under neoliberalism, non-profit service delivery or 'third sector' organizations expanded, apparently to fill some of the social cracks in the retreating welfare system, but ultimately serving a more palliative than transformative function. In response to that, SSE extends beyond cooperatives, mutuals and non-profits to grass-roots organizations and recognizes a 'plural economy' and a mix of principles, to govern resource allocation and exchange. These *include* the market, but also redistribution (via the state) and reciprocity (via group solidarity)' as identified by Polanyi (1944). Peter Simonic, in *Anthropological Perspectives of Solidarity and Reciprocity*, reminds us that it was economic anthropology, with the contributions of Malinowski, Mauss, Polanyi and others to propose the concept of reciprocity as 'a continuum of moral obligations along the processes of exchange'. Beyond the market, anthropology 'added many examples of human organisations, economies and their indicators' (2019: 11).

One example of solidarity economy principles and innovations that have been co-opted and integrated within the capitalist market is the so-called sharing economy, which has been effectively turned into an even more alienating and extractive form of labour exploitation under the aegis of the 'gig economy'. We find a clear analysis of this transformation in the above mentioned UNRISD conference proceedings *Beyond the Fringe* (2015). Back in 2013, the author Carina Millstone does not mention Uber, but rather Zipcar (a short-term car rental company) and Buzzcar (a peer-to-peer car rental agency), both active in the USA, providing this critique of the 'sharing economy': "These both provide a similar service to members of car-pooling cooperatives, and have clear environmental benefits compared with individual car ownership. However, while car-pooling cooperatives help to build community, a business such as Zipcar does not. The extent to which Buzzcar could help build new digital communities through its use of social media remains to be seen. Unlike car cooperatives, the profits of these businesses accrue to owners, not to member-users (Millstone 2015, 96). Ultimately, the sharing economy "is

leading to the further corporate presence in what has traditionally been a space of opportunity for SSE organisations. Social media provide traditional companies with the social knowledge and networks that were previously accessible only to SSE organisations, thus depriving the latter of one of their core competitive advantages" (Millstone 2015, 97). Just a decade later we can see how this analysis holds, well beyond car sharing. This illuminating critique helps us remain skeptical of words (such as 'sharing'), also with regard to food, and look more in-depth at actual practices, their diversity and ambivalences. In my work I try to do that with concepts like 'citizenship' and 'solidarity', with regard to food procurement. In what follows, I summarize the significance of notions of solidarity in the "heritage arena" (Grasseni 2017).

Solidarity in the heritage arena

Under COVID19, solidarity activism and what I have called the "heritage arena" - namely the extremely competitive market for traditional foods - converged in intriguing ways (Grasseni 2022). Due to the pandemic, lockdown complicated the distribution networks of heritage foods and impeded them to a degree, especially in the case of mountain cheese from the Italian Alpine region, where quality certification and specialist shops have been the main marketing strategy for local products. In Val Taleggio (Lombardy), a cooperative of producers appealed online to local consumers of the province of Bergamo in the name of solidarity. The cheesemakers also connected directly with solidarity economy networks active in the area, who in turn self-organized about five hundred collective orders within weeks. Previously, Solidarity Purchase Groups had not been interested in heirloom productions, especially when marketed as niche by perceived elitist circles such as Slow Food (Grasseni 2020).

By and large, "food activists" wish to express and practice solidarity with food producers who abide by certain values (for example small scale, ecological sustainability, animal welfare, fiscal transparency etc., see Counihan and Siniscalchi 2013). Food producers on the other hand compete for premium prices on the market, using notions of excellence, authenticity and singularity, especially in the context of the European system for Protected Designations of Origin (Grasseni 2017). Solidarity activists however are not necessarily moved *per se* by the distinctive quality or cultural heritage of the food their local territories produce. Vice versa, if not disdained,

alternative food networks are often overlooked in the glossy brochures which tend to celebrate instead the distinction and excellence of culinary production. Also in terms of lifestyles, social networks and personal connections, there is not too much convergence between the entrepreneurial world of PDO consortia and producers' associations on the one hand, and the food activists and critical consumers engaging in direct and short food chains on the other.

However, the pandemic emergency urged an open and non-elitist communication strategy to broaden and diversify distribution channels, emphasized and enabled also by the local (digital) press. Perhaps it was just luck that, just as COVID was breaking out in Bergamo, we happened to hold a conference in Val Taleggio bringing together representatives of Bergamo's solidarity economy networks and of local cheese consortia. Thanks also to my invited contribution to the conference organization, at the eve of lockdown, these speakers and conference participants wove networks which turned out to be crucial just one month later. The breaking down of logistics under lockdown brought new understandings of local productive agricultural landscapes as a valued resource. Now marketing had to compromise with the language and practice of solidarity economy. As a result, the semantics of 'heritage cheese' shifted, in this period, from one of mountain cheese as 'dairy excellence' to one of mountain cheese as 'genuine, local, produced by farmers close-by and in need of help' (Grasseni 2022). The solidarity groups, who literally bought this semantics of proximity and thus began to support local economies, were driven by processes of identification with the popular roots, rather than by the distinction, of mountain cheese.

However, this emotional identification with local foods glosses over the contradiction that heritage foods would embody folk knowledge - as well as the ecologies and histories of local territories - but have sometimes become inaccessible to popular consumption because of their price, niche availability and a marketing style based on social distinction. While this is often the only viable strategy for a sustainable business in the highly competitive and often evanescent market of the 'heritage arena', it makes it all the more pertinent to evaluate the potentials and limits of the convergence of socio-economic actors coming from these diverse networks and philosophies, supporting each other in times of urgency, as happened during the COVID

pandemic, but so far not changing the nature of their relations as market relationship (see Strasser 2003).

Just like we noticed before about the sharing economy, some of this solidarity-driven first wave can be lost to digital marketing, and in any case never changed the nature of this market. The producers' appeal to solidarity deployed digitally-enabled forms of direct sale, rather than more complex forms of community supported agriculture or participatory certification, which would require lengthier processes of negotiation and a deeper synergy on goals. This is because, as noticed by the scholars quoted in the previous section, solidarity economy does "not belong naturally to the world of market relations, but occupy another sphere of human exchange, even when they use market mechanisms to bring benefits to their members and communities. Individual consumption of goods and services procured on the market can seem at odds with the collective, civic character of SSE organisations. In fact, consumption has typically been understood as the opposite of citizenship, with citizenship rooted in communal and local practice whereas consumption is associated with the individual identity, the global and the faraway" (Millstone 2015, 96; Trentmann 2007). In fact we are reminded that "the consumption of goods and services from large companies does require some abstraction from our civic, social or environmental concerns (due to the externalisation of environmental and social impact)" (Millstone 2015, 96). The concept of food citizenship arose in reaction precisely to this abstraction, as I will elaborate in the following section.

Food citizenship?

The concept of food citizenship is not about citizenship formally understood (as in being citizens of a nation). It arose in the context of literature on ethical consumption (Carrier and Luetchford 2012), economic solidarity (Ash 2009), and alternative provisioning (Renting et al. 2012). The appropriation of this expression in the context of solidarity economies is consistent with the emergence of the figure of the so-called 'activist citizen' (Isin 2009) as a result of the transformation of societal understandings of solidarity and ethical engagement. To quote James Carrier, ethical consumers are simply 'those whose decisions about what to consume are shaped by their assessment of the moral nature of' shopping (Carrier and Luetchford 2012: 1). With "food

citizenship" instead, one underlines the active engagement of individuals from a civic point of view in societal relations, especially if the practice of food citizenship allows a communal perspective and shared practices, underlying the collective and social aspects of it. The limitation of this approach consists in making 'active' citizens responsible for ameliorating the societal (and environmental) evils produced by a capitalist economic system. This is part of the double-sided results of critical consumerism in contexts of neoliberal hegemonic domination, following an argument inaugurated amongst others by Andrea Muelebach in *The moral neoliberal* (2012). Thus, citizens and consumers, activists and volunteers take over the moral task of providing services that in a welfare state model would be issued by the state – importantly – not as a form of charity but as a right of the citizens.

The equation of 'food citizenship' with various forms of ethical 'shopping' is present in early scholarship introducing the expression, limiting 'food citizenship' to exercising conscious buying according to values (for example, preference for agroecological products) and consumer's agency, albeit limited by their capacity to so-to-speak 'vote with one's dollar'. One problem with it is the fact that it conceptually subsumes a political form of participation under a purely economic act. Additionally, consumers are expected to act more responsibly than those economic actors who inject unethical products in the market economy. By a sheer adjustment of demand and offer, the offer would thus be pressured into becoming more ethical. Easily co-opted by corporate social responsibility schemes, this notion of the citizen-consumer confirms that, for example, food should be viewed mostly as a market commodity, overlooking the cultural and embedded dimensions of food procurement. In other words, the term food citizenship does not encompass nor emphasize the diversity of food-citizens practice in diverse contexts, even among different countries from the same macro-region such as Europe, which still significantly diverge in terms of trust in the market and in the state, citizenry's associative capacities and cooperative histories. The project *FoodCitizens?* addresses and problematizes this diversity as I will explain next.

The project 'food citizens' bears a question mark in its title because it sets out to investigate precisely how 'food citizenship' would work in practice. If we look into the rhetoric and even standard imagery depicting the global food system today, there's very little space for nuance,

context, and for the sociocultural dimension - namely for agency, conflict, for relationships among humans and between humans and non-humans. The intuition behind the *Food Citizens?* project is that by re-introducing these collective and social elements we would be investigating more than food procurement per se, but also styles of participation.

Even just across Europe, collective food procurement goes beyond 'sustainability fixes' and techno-scientific imaginaries of 'future foods', and inevitably remind us of a diversity of histories, styles of governance, ways of getting by and economic standards, relevant societal debates, and modes of participation. Solidarity, diversity, skill, and scale are the chosen cultural dimensions, or entry points in our project - namely categories of analysis from which to interrogate collective food procurement, in order to answer questions such as: Which skills do people involved in collective food procurement acquire or lack? How do they operate across and within diverse communities? Do their networks scale 'up' or 'out', and how? How do they interpret and articulate solidarity? For the purpose of answering these question in an empirical and comparative way, we began with a definition of 'collective food procurement' meant as participation as a group in either production, distribution or consumption of food. We investigated this in three cities in particular (Gdańsk, Rotterdam and Turin) at multiple levels: self-production or foraging (for example in urban food gardens, allotments, or through *gleaning,* see Varda 2000, Edwards and Mercer 2012), short food chains (for example through solidarity purchase groups, Grasseni 2013) and local food governance (for example through food councils - see Scherb et al. 2012 - but also NGOs - see Vasile and Grasseni 2022). For example at the first level of analysis, 'self-production and foraging', a team of fieldworkers[1] found out several ways of self-catering, for example through urban gardens, but also through collection of waste food by comparable groups such as Food not Bombs self-organized collectives, in more than one city (see for example Gracjasz and Grasseni 2020).

Before leaving for the field and after coming back, we critically engaged a matrix of identified and potential case studies with questions summarized in a field research protocol. This asked, for

[1] The project 'Food citizens? Collective food procurement in European cities: solidarity and diversity, skills and scale' has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant agreement No. 724151). A research teamwork composed of Federico De Musso, Ola Gracjasz, Cristina Grasseni, Maria Vasile, Robin Smith and Vincent Walstra concurred to produce an interactive platform and several scientific and disseminative outputs (www.foodcitizens.eu).

example regarding solidarity, what its interpretations, practices, and limits were. How do local meanings of solidarity emerge from local histories? How are collective food procurement networks perceived differently in different communities? Which shared imaginaries underlie practices of collective food procurement? For example, how do 'community gardens' re-cast 'allotments' in terms of self-sufficiency, gentrification, or social inclusion? Do, and if so, how do collective food procurement networks re-cast direct or informal supply in terms of reciprocity obligations? Are, and if so, how are such re-significations embedded in definitions of food as culturally appropriate (for example as 'traditional', 'local', or 'genuine')? Our conceptualization included both a narrative and a visual dimension, resulting in a digital platform which is currently on line open access. This chapter is also an invitation to visit this i-doc as an ethnographic repository.[2] Based on our recursive discussions and brainstorming of the ethnographies conducted by Ola Gracjasz, Vincent Walstra and Maria Vasile in the cities of Gdańsk, Rotterdam and Turin, we chose the most iconic people, places and events that would allow us to depict our lines of investigation on a digital canvas. The i-doc reproduces in digital and multimodal form the conceptual maps we drew during our collective sessions.

Multiple explorations of the Food Citizens? digital canvas are possible, in this case I focus on contrasting examples and meanings of solidarity. Navigating the fictive three-city, icons graphically designed by Federico De Musso represent real places where fieldwork took place, including community gardens, allotment gardens, food banks, (networks of) food aid NGOs, (networks of) solidarity economy groups and shops, food markets, innovative food entrepreneurs (such as vegan shops and cafes in Gdańsk and the Fenix Food Factory in Rotterdam), food cooperatives and online delivery platforms among others. Clicking on the icons, one can browse sixty videos, seventy photo slideshows, ten sound files (soundscapes and interviews), and ten text documents gathered during fieldwork. Each field location is described with a short text,

[2] The Food Citizens? I-doc (https://www.foodcitizens.eu/idoc/) visualizes about fifty case studies which are identifiable as icons on a map. It is an interactive platform that can be navigated online (please use Firefox as a browser). This imaginary canvas, designed by Federico De Musso, ideally connects Gdańsk, Rotterdam and Turin in a single cartographic space. This is crossed by a single imaginary river which symbolizes the important waterways marking the landscape and topography of each city, namely the Vistula and the port waters of the Hanseatic port of Gdańsk on the Baltic sea, the Rhine/Meuse estuary in Rotterdam, and the Dora and Po rivers conjoining in Turin as they descend from the Alps.

multimedia attachments. Four-colour lines connect thematically each location with others in the same city and in the other two cities. These thematic connections explore the dimensions of solidarity (what does 'solidarity' mean for this initiative?), diversity (how do they interpret and act upon 'diversity'?), skill (which skills are learnt and taught and to whom?) and scale (do these initiatives want to scale 'up' or 'out', can they, and why?) of the case studies. These are the four categories we used to juxtapose and contrast cases, in order to create a comparative analysis connecting real people, places and networks which we encountered ethnographically.

With a 4-switch digital dial one can choose which category one wishes to investigate between solidarity, diversity, skill and scale (De Musso 2022). For example, *Orti Generali* is an urban gardening project born in 2019 in Southern Turin as part of broader plans for urban renewal in neighborhoods affected by the FIAT downsizing.[3] Many volunteers were involved in the reorganization of a previously semi abandoned green public area. Now it offers 160 individual allotments for rent as well as shared gardening and recreational spaces, including a didactical farm. While opening up opportunities (for gardening, social relations, and events), the food garden also lives an ambivalent dialectic between imposing management standards and developing an inclusive governance. This is a difficult endeavor because the management does aim to either subsume or replace the spontaneous gardens tended in unlicensed allotments on the same plot of land and in the area surrounding it. Gardening along streams, rural roads, and railway lines is formally illegal although it is a widespread practice in Turin. This phenomenon grew particularly in the 1970s, with the increase of the urban population as a result of industrial development and internal migration. The new city residents included factory workers from rural southern Italy, who developed urban gardens for both subsistence and recreation (Vasile 2021). Among others, more than 300 spontaneous gardens still exist along the road leading to *Orti Generali*. The argument Maria Vasile makes in her Ph.D. thesis based on ethnography of this development site is that solidarity is expected in the form of voluntary work - in this case, in the form of principled participation in projects of urban renewal the governance of which remains however one-sided (Vasile 2023). In Turin as elsewhere, however, solidarity and community-

[3] For *Orti Generali, il Boschetto,* and the spontaneous gardens in the area, the *Food Citizens?* i-doc provides videos, photo slides, soundscapes and textual documentation (https://www.foodcitizens.eu/idoc/). The summary I offer in this paragraph is based on the texts appearing in the i-doc and authored by Maria Vasile and Federico De Musso.

building emerge differently in different gardens. For example, *il Boschetto* is a social garden in North Turin comprising around twenty individual allotments encircled by high-rise social housing. A social garden hosts agroecological gardening, social inclusion and educational activities, and is managed directly by its gardeners on a daily basis. They organize social moments including food and community events, and presentations about sustainable urban practices targeted to the whole neighborhood. Compared with *Orti Generali*, *il Boschetto* is smaller, prioritizes self-managing practices, and involves only local inhabitants. At *il Boschetto*, neighborly solidarity is self-organized, and enacted as cooperation and care - even for people who do not tend the individual plots or the social garden, but live nearby.

In other urban gardens elsewhere, solidarity is experienced as a form of diffused sociality. For example, in Rotterdam, in the social garden *GroenGoed* (virtually connected to *Orti Generali* in the i-doc navigation), gardening is experienced as a tool for sociality. Participants are encouraged to look for collaborations and group activities beyond individual plots. In some other Dutch initiatives of urban social gardens, we find a similar care for neighborly relations and a collective experience defining solidarity (Walstra 2021). This is unlike the average allotment gardens which are individually allocated by the municipal government and tended in strictly private ways by individuals or families, either as production gardens for family self-provisioning or as recreation space in lieu of a home garden. [4] One can speak of top-down solidarity because access to the scarce number of municipal allotments is granted by the municipality based on income, similarly to how, for example, access to the *Food Bank* in Gdańsk is dependent on income and regulated in detail by municipality social services, who operate the food bank on a token system. We can distinguish this kind of bureaucratic solidarity from the anarchist, activist solidarity of *Food not Bombs* who, for example in Gdansk and Turin, see solidarity as a form of redistribution and not as a meritocracy. *Food not Bombs* gives universal access to their free meals, cooked with waste vegetables gathered for free by the food activists in fresh food markets after the hours of trade (Gracjasz 2020).

[4] The summary I offer in this paragraph of the case studies Groen Goed, Food Bank Gdańsk and Food not Bombs is based on the texts appearing in the i-doc and authored by Vincent Walstra, Ola Gracjasz and Federico De Musso.

Concluding

After an initial contextualization of solidarity economy literature and a reflection on how it differs from purely market relations, including the so-called 'sharing economy', I considered the multiple potential convergences between solidarity economy networks and local producers, specifically of heritage foods. Both share a commitment to transparent chains of production and distribution, both recognize the added value of local foods and pledge to find ways of retribution for its producers through fair prices. Both indicate the cultural and environmental higher sustainability of localised systems of food production and intend to provide a protected environment for local economies to thrive and to benefit their communities and constituencies as a form of solidarity. The ways they go about this goal, however, largely diverge. Heritage marketing operates through circuits of added value creation through certifications, geographical indications, and high prices. On the other hand, solidarity economies networks tend to operate through grassroots circuits of critical consumption. How do solidarity economy networks choose whom to act in solidarity with, and what does it mean in practice? In order to answer these questions it seems important to take stock of the many nuances and understandings of solidarity in actual practices (third part of the chapter), behind and perhaps beyond umbrella terms that are trendy in scholarship and movements, such as 'food citizenship'. Through the food-citizens i-doc we have tried as a team to combine ethnography in three sites to highlight at least some of these juxtapositions and discrepancies, and to share them with a broader public. So 'solidarity' can be enacted in rather top-down ways, through bureaucracies or NGOs, but can emerge also from neighbourly relations and feed back into them. However proximity per se does not cultivate solidarity and does not necessarily play a role in superseding market relations.

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Human solidarity economies

Peter Simonič

University of Ljubljana

Introduction

The ideologies and practices of solidarity that are once again attractive to society and anthropology today are not new but have appeared throughout history in different forms, in different geographical longitudes and latitudes, with different ontologies, they could be mutually reinforcing or in conflict with each other. When anthropology deals with different forms of sociality, it should be interested in the socio-ecological conditions and contexts of their emergence, their arguments and practices, and their transformative power.

The author discusses current developments in the field of solidarity economies in the light of past crises in European society. The analysis identifies different mechanisms that can be used in a comparative study of solidarity economies.

Polyvalent solidarity

The concept of solidarity encompasses various social practices and draws on different epistemologies and ideologies that respond to social asymmetries. It can include state redistribution through taxation, social and health policies, various types of charity, kinship relations, neighbourhood and local aid, local food supply, altruistic contributions and political support, social policies, concessions, grants, funds, food, clothing, social entrepreneurship, sponsorship, NGOs, etc., etc. In its essence, the concept of solidarity is thus ambivalent (Smith and Grasseni 2020) or polyvalent (Brunkhorst 2005 [2002]).

> "The history of solidarity is however, older than the egalitarian and democratic definition of the term. The word itself has Latin origins, where it refers to cooperative liability

> [*Haftungsgenossenschaft*] within civil law. Unlike brotherliness, which was originally familial but had already been detached from blood relations by Christianity and extended to the brotherhood of all Christians/human beings, solidarity is originally a legal concept." (Brunkhorst 2005: 1-2)

One of the narrower definitions of civic solidarity focuses on the practical cooperation and support of people in a smaller geographical area. It is referred to as *solidarity economy* (Gregorčič, Babič and Kozinc 2018; Kawano, Masterson and Teller-Elsberg 2009; Orlić 2014), *participatory, collaborative or sharing economy* (Simonič 2019a; Travlou and Ciolfi 2022), *social economy* (Ash 2009; Everling 1997; Gosar 1924), also *moral economy* (Mau 2004; Scott 1977; Thompson 1971; Tripp 2006). To this bouquet of names and concepts, the more enterprising add *social entrepreneurship* (Defourny and Nyssens 2021 [2001]; Nicholls 2006). Solidarity, cooperation, and morality characterize a particular domain of economic practices that stand in opposition to or in addition to the dominant economic starting points and models (entrepreneurship, corporatism, financialization, private accumulation, wages). Of course, this is not entirely realistic either in terms of ethnography (the interweaving of human economic activities of different legal forms) or in terms of theory, since we ideologically attribute the qualities of solidarity only to a selected sphere of the economy, rather than reflecting on the extent and types of solidarities, the historical circumstances and forces of their emergence and dissolution, their ideas and actions, ideologues and members, etc. The whole field of human economic practices, attitudes and theories should encompass the so-called *human economy*, which has a new anthropological theoretical and moral basis (Hart, Laville and Cattani 2010).

At the beginning of the 21st century, solidarity economies were associated with social movements that opposed economic centralization, liberalism and egoism, as well as value dualism, which assigned a subordinate role to contractual or solidarity economies ("alternatives"). Ecological considerations also became particularly important. The anthropology of the business and entrepreneurship, for example, went in the completely opposite direction, analysing individual and corporate interventions in social reality and its changes in line with the neoliberal zeitgeist. We can analyse corporate environments as (interest) communities and write

ethnographies about them (Capricorn 2018, 2023; Rosa and Douglas Caulkins 2013; comp. Schumpeter (2021 [1911]).

The concepts of the solidarity economy differ from one another depending on the theoretical rejection of the prevailing political-economic model, social position of their members and the various practical conditions in which they function. In principle, modern solidarity economies are a combination of civil society movements and social science and humanist thinkers: sociologists, philosophers, anthropologists, psychologists. Very few economists can be met here (Simonič 2023).

In the article, I present the disposition of different manifestations of “solidarity economies”. I see them as different "spatial-temporal realities" in the life course of societies, communities and individuals. They occur sporadically, yet permanently, at different levels of society and often with different ideological backgrounds. We have known them since the emergence of humans as social beings, and they became particularly politically conscious in ancient centralized political systems, as a defence of family, lineage, local and other sovereignties or as a retreat into the "archaic" or "anarchic" (Scott 2009). What historiography and sociology see as particular historical processes or zeitgeists should be a starting point in economic and historical anthropology for comparing views, practices, socio-environmental conditions and so on. Anthropological theory is an important component of such an analysis.

The article therefore aims to identify the structure and layers of anthropological knowledge about solidarity economies. What comparisons can we draw from the ethnographic fragments available to us? The material comes partly from the literature and partly from my own ethnographic work in the fields of solidarity, reciprocity, economics, politics and ecology.

Methodological inertia

Susana Narotzky has noted that reciprocity has become one of the fundamental characteristics of economic anthropology (Narotzky 2007). It has become the central value category that distinguishes economic anthropology from classical economics. The focus of economic anthropologists has been on face-to-face social relationships or communities, on "reciprocity", "embeddedness" or at least on "social capital". Since this is a sphere that is neither individualistic

(economic) nor nationalistic (sociological), but somewhere in between – at the level of kinship, local and other collective (civil) society - "reciprocity", "embeddedness" and "social capital" could be defined as distinguishing features and even as a kind of political project of the anthropological "third way". It is not the third way of *social democracy* redefined by the British sociologist Antony Giddens (2008 [1988]; on the economic collapse of socialism, hence the new labor-capital compromise needed in Europe). It is no third way in the international *non-aligned movement* after the Second World War (Jakovina 2011; Lamberger Khatib 2009; Predan and Tepina 2023; against two political blocs after the Second World War and solidarity (exchange) among the members of the Non-Aligned Movement). It is not a third way in the sense of *bourgeois civil society* (Hann and Dunn 1996), and it is also not a third way in the sense of the modern *ecological contribution* to nineteenth-century (class) critique (Eckersley 2004). And yet the path of economic anthropology often intersects morally, theoretically, and temporally with the above interpretations of thirdness.

The second inertia refers to the location of the object of research in an imagined dualistic social system. At the beginning of the 20th century, anthropology translated the sociological (national) concept of *solidarity* (Tönnies, 2001 [1887]; Durkheim 1984 [1893]) into (communal) *reciprocity*. For Mauss (1966 [1925]), solidarity can arise either through contractual agreements of individualized societies through market exchange or through the gift-giving of mostly non-European, primitive, *stateless societies*. Economic anthropology followed the concept of reciprocity – a continuum of moral obligations along exchange processes that differs from the unison dominating classical economics (Malinowski 2002 [1922]; Mauss 1966 [1925]; Lévi-Strauss 2015 [1955]; Polanyi 1957; Sahlins 1972).

Folklore, ethnology, and anthropology emerged as sciences about the overlooked but nevertheless important subjects of state or colonial (imperial) power. Their diversity was linked by a "view from below", a view of peoples' lives, identities, psychology and later mass culture, everyday life and the like; all actually in relation or in opposition to the state or high culture. "Histories from below" reveal various social processes that bypass or oppose the dominant discourses and centers of power, even though they may be in proactive communication with them. Such a starting point naturally brought political and economic anthropology close to social

theories and movements such as *Proudhonism, Marxism, anarchism, mutualism (solidarisme), familiarism, re-evangelization, feminism, autonomism, subalternity, multitude, revival of the commons*, etc.

Ethnography has traditionally focused on smaller groups and their relationships outside or within larger centralized social systems (Greaber 2004).

Economic crisis 2008

The global economic crisis was the result of the growth of speculative capital and the "real estate bubble" in the United States of America. The course for both crises was set by the oil crisis, the liberalization of the financial markets and the rise of the debt economy in the early 1970s and later also by the industrial rise of China (Harvey 2005; Lapavitsas 2009; Lazzarato 2012; Štiblar 2008; Varoufakis 2011).

After the collapse of the stock market due to the insolvency of the banks, they received extensive aid from the state or taxpayers ("bailouts"), while on the other hand wage and social policies ("austerity", divestments, etc.) and economic policies (precarisation) were introduced (Mattei 2022). The process of digitalization and automation of production, administration and other communication processes also increased the pressure on citizens' employment, livelihood, and political opportunities (Graeber 2015; Podjed 2019). The economic rationality of the Western world increasingly centralized food supply chains for the needs of the urbanized world population, bought land and housing as investments, managed seeds, water, urban centres ("gentrification"), in short, included more and more previously public or less protected goods in global commodity valuation and exchange (Bollier 2014). The common good based on a shared consensus gave way to selfishness, which was ultimately intended to benefit everyone economically (Smith 2007 [1776]; Hann and Hart 2009). In the eyes of social critics, society disintegrated into atomized, competitive and tricky individuals, companies and states ("game theory"). National laws around the world adapted to this neoliberal rationality of the world's largest economy, the US, by lowering the tax burden on corporations and reducing or slowing the growth of the value of labour.

Although the crisis statistically increased the unemployment rate, it showed on the other hand that people survived the crisis with various (additional) informal forms of income: working without contracts, in the garden and at home, returning to the parental household, helping relatives and neighbours, etc. which raised awareness of the contrast between work recognized by the market and other unrecorded, non-wage forms of engagement and creativity (Narotzky 2018). They can also be important, actually necessary in a crisis – for citizens to survive and for the state as a social relief and economic revitalization (Gregorčič, Babič, and Kozinc 2018; Hart, Laville, and Cattani 2010; Hosaralmo 2019; Poljak Istenič 2018; Rakopoulos 2018; Rosa and Caulkins 2013;). Social insecurity encouraged the search for alternative solutions, which is why participatory political, economic and ecological movements sprang up like mushrooms. As these *utopias* or *heterotopias* were often inspired by models from the past, Zygmund Bauman (2018) called them *retrotopias*.

The economic crisis strained relations between Europe's North, South, East and West, which are interdependent but have different historical, political and economic backgrounds and objectives, and caused a crisis of European solidarity. The capital centres in Berlin, Paris and London exacerbated the crisis in the South and East through their insistence on established financial flows, so that the search for alternatives in the later was particularly lively (cooperatives, local food supply, political reorientation). At the political level, discontent also fostered the rise of various national authoritarian leaders in Europe (Berberoglu 2021) and, at the economic level, the European systemic promotion of entrepreneurship and active citizenship (Biesta 2011; Kozorog 2023).

The severity of the crisis after 2008 is evidenced by the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences, which was awarded to Elenor Ostrom in 2009 for her research on the *commons* (Ostrom 2003, 2009). She developed her theory using Robert Nettings cultural ecology in the Swiss Alps (1981) to demonstrate the feasibility and sustainability of small-scale common pool management. Not long before, Western political economy has rejected this theory (Hayek 1958 [1948]; Hardin 1968).

Even if the social need and sociological interest in solidarity and self-governed solidarity economies were exceptional, they were short-lived and died as soon as the economic crisis ended, or people adapted to the new reality. A comparison between cooperatives and digital

start-ups in Maribor (Slovenia) from 2008 to 2021 showed that cooperatives received only temporary political and financial support, while the start-up movement also has global business support and numerous EU funding mechanisms. Thus, even if (supra)national legislation in the crisis approaches the normative equality of individual and solidarity-based enterprises, the problem of their investment attractiveness, growth potential, global transfers in ownership and, last but not least, the ethics of their members, socialized through the dualistic school system and mass media, remains (Simonič 2021). A fundamental problem arises as soon as a voluntary association of individuals is translated into an economic and market economy entity that is to be subject to commercial law, not civil law (Babič 2018).

The welfare state

The experiences of the First and Second World Wars brought social democracy to most European states. Social democracy and the welfare states in the parliamentary democracies of Western Europe were a response to the more radical demands of Marxists and communists, which intensified after the October Revolution in Russia in 1917. At the end of the Second World War, a new balance had to be found. At the same time, a larger group of socialist countries emerged in Eastern Europe and a fascist group in the south (Portugal, Spain, Greece).

The need for labour due to the reconstruction of Western Europe after the war, the threat of a socialist revolution in Western Europe and the liberation movements in the colonies intensified the processes of social (state) solidarity, i.e. the conscious adressing of the contradictions between the interests of capital and labour. At the system level, social democracy ensured the redistribution in housing, scholarships, schools, scientific, health and cultural institutions, pension funds, infrastructure, leisure, vacations, rural homes. At the same time the state directed the development of the various sectors of the economy. Such a policy ensured social peace and at the same time the feeling of general social progress (the capitalist "welfare state"). (Keynes 2013 [1937]; Edgar and Russell, 2005 [1998]; Gough 1979; Mau 2004; Piketty 2020). Important for our discussion is the fact that solidarity has become a valued feature of centralized Western European states, not only of their (alternative) subsystems, groups, and kinship. Indeed, the political-economic system removed obstacles to its functioning, at least declaratively. As a result,

after the Second World War, interest in gardening declined due to higher standards in Western Europe, while workers in Eastern Europe, where industrialization was on the rise at the time, supplemented their diet and nourish rural nostalgia with urban gardens or second homes – dachas (Rusanov 2019).

In the authoritarian regimes of southern Europe, production and redistribution were also centralized. The Spanish state had a close relationship with the church and industry. A particularly interesting result of this often-overlooked connection is the Basque social cooperative Mondragón, which has great economic and political significance in its relationship among members and in the relationship of the ethnic group to the Spanish central authority (Bradley and Gelb 1983; Kasmir 1996).

Socialism or state communitarianism prevailed in Eastern Europe, which not only changed economic and social policy, but also intervened in property, the means of production, social and economic planning, and redistribution. The desire for a radical transformation of social relations created a highly centralized state that, at least declaratively, thought collectivist at all levels; from agricultural and industrial enterprises to schools, communities, sports and rituals (Čepič 2010; Hann 1993; Humphrey, 1983; Lane 1981).

With the introduction of statutory neoliberal policies in the early 1980s in the United States of America and later in Western and Central Europe, the welfare state began to disintegrate. The process of post-socialist transition of the Eastern European countries after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 thus coincided with the accelerated neoliberal transition in the core countries of the European Union. During this period, research on hunter-gatherers (Lee and DeVore 2009 [1968]) as the original "affluent societies" (Sahlins 1972) was developed in light of critiques of Western modernity. And let us not forget the substantivist Karl Polanyi, who explicitly compared the principles of market integration of states and mutual (solidarity) mechanisms (K. Polanyi 1957). On the other hand, the tragedy of Hardin (1968), who theoretically defended the privatization of everything in contemporary society.

Among the particular social experiments, some so-called socialist projects should be mentioned. One of them is, for example, *self-government* in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which was based on the third way - not national, not private, but social (Duda 2023; Kardelj 1980;

Toplak 2019). Or the *colonizat*ion of Palestinian land that took place under the first socialist Israeli government of David Ben-Gurion. Jewish kibbutzim teach us how important agrarian communal (reciprocal) approaches can be during the establishment of the nation-state (Pappé 2006; Spiro 1956) and how these ties change and dissolve (Spiro 2004).

In my own research, I chose a comparison of the theory and practice of housing cooperatives in Maribor during and after socialism (Simonič 2015). The analysis showed that the socialist state promoted and protected cooperative associations with financial and spatial laws, while the transitional and liberalized state completely withdrew from the real estate market, transferring the responsibility entirely to the individual and their relationship with the bank (mortgage loans). Community rational also influenced socialist architecture or the design of functional *neighbourhoods* (Simonič 2015). Another study looked at an agricultural cooperative in the Indian state of Maharashtra, in the area between the cities of Pune and Kolhapur. There, too, it became obvious how important the cooperatives of small sugarcane farmers were for the establishment of Indian and Maharashtrian sovereignty, how they were linked to the Yugoslav experiment, how they transformed and preserved the caste system and how they broke down again with the neoliberal reforms in India in the 1990s (Simonič 2014)

Around the First World War

Much has been written about the political and economic reasons for the First World War and the subsequent "economic crisis" of 1929. Among the reasons, authors cite monopolism, technological development, colonialism, imperialism, protectionism, and similar accelerated processes from the 19th century (Coolidge 1919; Lenin 1958 [1916]; Polany 2001 [1944]; Taylor 1948).

For social and cultural anthropology, the period before and after the First World War was a time of theoretical and academic constitution. Classic works on solidarity or pre- and market-economic relations and morality were written during this period (Malinowski 2002 [1922]; Mauss 1966 [1925]). Institutions and integration of insulated, non-European cultures were at the centre of interest. Socialism, fascism and the American New Deal were described as collectivist state

projects that interfered with the liberal principles of laissez-faire "because the market society did not work" (Polanyi 2001: 248).

Mauss advocated the "third way" of economic anthropology (against etatism and egoism) and therefore supported the cooperative movement in his day because it was more akin to kinship relations and established local cooperation. Regarding social insurance in France and the socialist (Soviet) state, he notes that they provide security for people who dedicate part of their lives to the prosperity of the community (welfare); he had a similarly positive opinion of trade unions and consumer cooperatives, which developed in the second half of the 19th century. In short, until then economists mostly overlooked or neglected mutuality and exchange between families, clans, and tribes. They mainly pursued the principle of (material) utility - in English philosophy called utilitarianism (Mauss 1966 (1925): 67-70; Graeber 2001: 151-228). The young British anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown was called “Anarchy Brown” and was also interested in "stateless societies" later in his academic career “(Graeber 2004: 16; cf. Boas 1897).

The Slovenian Christian Socialist Andrej Gosar took up the debate of J.E. Krek from the 19th century (see below) and came to the conclusion that there cannot be a universally valid system of self-government (such as cooperatives), but that each state must be organised according to its specific conditions; because the best state system is the one that enables as much individual and public prosperity as possible. In the middle between the two extremes – between private and no ownership – cooperatives in particular have established themselves in modern times, tending towards a common economy based on the free collaboration of members (Gosar. 1924; 1994 [1933]). Gosar, who was revived after the 2008 crisis, considered self-management and democracy as antipodes, since "local authority is as primordial as the state" (Gosar 1994 [1933]: 213; Toplak 2019: 102). In the Soviet Union, this dilemma manifested itself in a very authoritarian way, which stimulated the creation of socialist cooperatives in Eastern Europe, but also influenced their bad reputation in modern times (Simonič 2019b).

The 19th century

The 19th century brought a decisive capitalist change, the intensified rural-urban migration, the development of industry, the natural and social sciences and the emergence of nation states and

heritages. (Hobsbawm. 1975, 1987, 1992). Imagined national communities offered belonging and economic protection (protectionist markets: Germany, Italy, Austria-Hungary (Anderson 1998 [1983]; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Giraud. 2006 [1996]: 89-117).

Among the more important authors of anarchist ("non-state") literature in the second half of the century, I highlight the Russians Mikhail Bakhunin (1970 [1871]) and Peter Kropotkin (1969 [1896]; 1912 [1898]; 1972 [1902]). There we also earlier "socialist", "anarchist" or "self-managed" proposals from the first half of the 19th century: Pierre Joseph Proudhon (in defense of small property, against centralized currencies, abolition of the state), Charles Fourier (self-managed cooperatives, phalansteries of 1620 people) and Henry Saint-Simon (communitarianism) (Polanyi. 2001: 111; Toplak 2019: 99-102). European urbanization and colonialism generally led to the collapse of traditional values, solidarity, and mutual participation in European non-European communities.

At the end of the 19th century, the Slovenian Catholic socialist Janez Evangelist Krek skilfully described the changes and consequences of modern agricultural policy in many European countries in the book *Črne bukve kmečkega stanu* (Black Books of Peasants, 1885). He was particularly interested in European farmers' cooperatives and campaigned for the establishment of cooperatives and loan companies in Carniola to enable farmers to defend themselves against the influence of large land and financial capital (indebtedness of farmers, confiscation of property, etc.). On the other hand, urbanization and industrialization promoted the formation of trade unions and workers' consumer cooperatives. Or the Paris Commune of 1871, one of the mythological high points of the European labour movement (Marx 1979 [1871]).

The 19th century is also the time of the American Protestant settlers colonies and the arrival of the European Anabaptist communities in the United States of America (Amish, Hutterites; Bennet 1976). The first groups of Jewish colonists also appear in Palestine (Pappe 2006). The 19th century in the United States was generally favourable for the formation of colonies and various informal connections of young Protestant men. Informal connections helped immigrants to integrate raster into their new environment. There were numerous secret fraternities such as the Temperance Society, Know-Nothings, Nativism, Mormonism, Copperhead Societies, Veterans' Organization, Ku Klux Klan, Grangers, Insurance Societies, Knights of Labor and the like. There

were several levels of initiation. For fees, ritual events, uniforms, banquets, and trips, some spent two hundred dollars a year, while industrial workers earned about five hundred dollars during the same period. The interest in membership in *lodges* – another form of solidarity economy – is said to have been brought over from Europe (Carnes 1989).

The Swedish sociologist Steinar Stjernø summarized that the 19th century in Europe was a time of three overlapping solidarities: national, religious and class solidarity. Each of them promoted its own ideology, society, and infrastructure (Stjernø 2004). Their realization depended on the power of institutions and individuals in a particular setting in Europe (e.g. ritual or economic orientation; urban or rural; industrial-commercial, local-state, etc.).

The sociology and anthropology of the 19th century expressed the dilemmas between different solidarities through the juxtaposition of traditional and modern (Durkheim 1984 [1893]; Maine 1963 [1861]; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Tönnies 2001 [1887]). The positions also influenced the academic division of labour between sociology, orientalism and anthropology/ethnology (Wallerstein 2006: 1-11): the first two at the level of occidental and oriental civilizations, the second at the level of "volks-" and "völkerkunde" – communities of social ground and frontiers.

The comparative solidarity economy is a human economy

The further we go back into the European past, the less the small-scale solidary and collaborative practices of economic organization are seen as intentional groups to change capitalism (citizens; Brunkhorst)), but we perceive them as basic social structures at the level of kinship, village, even guild (professional) cooperation and solidarity. This process contradicts the logic of the anthropology of complex systems and globalization. This is why cooperatives emerged so massively in the 19th century, as they represent a social *contract* between participants for their common economic goals in the market. Before the second half of the 19th century, the cooperative was neither conceivable nor legally possible and meaningful because generalized (ancestral local) mutuality and reciprocity (Mauss 1966 [1925]; Sahlins 1972) and religious solidarity of feudal estates prevailed. Cooperatives could therefor be compared to earlier capital investments or joint-stock companies because they bundle interests in certain legal forms (projects, utopias), but the starting point and goal of their activities are different.

Dissolved medieval solidarity institutions may also include *guilds* (important model of economic integration, solidarity, and competition in the Middle Ages, which disintegrated due to state, market, and internal stratification; Weber 1950 [1923]: 136-161). However, it should not be forgotten that professional interests today are represented in various chambers, trade unions and associations.

One of the older forms of extended social solidarity is the Islamic *waqf* (Begović 1963; Ghazaleh 2011): the permanent inheritance of property or its proceeds for specifically defined users or purposes to achieve Allah's pleasure. Soon after the death of Muhammad, some people gave away land, houses, wells, livestock, or money to the Waqf. Today, the waqf is also used for other religious, educational, or charitable purposes, such as supporting a pilgrimage, restoring sacred objects, removing graffiti, supporting the gifted or disabled, protecting the human environment, etc. (Shukrija 2011). The donor of the waqf cannot revoke his decision, the waqf cannot be sold, given away or bequeathed, in short, the waqf is not marketable (Begović 1963: 11-12).

The European religious orders of men and women in monasteries of the Middle Ages can be categorised as small, locally based and solidary economies, religious colonies and possible corporations which, depending on their mission (Franciscan, Benedictine, Cistercian, etc.), had a greater or lesser influence on the development of the surrounding agriculture and horticulture, herbalism, literacy, cultural community, and the landscape (Rebić, Bajt and Kocjan-Barle 2007).

The family or household remained the basic social institution of solidarity in all eras, even if its composition and role changed over time. Given the lesser extent of urbanization, most of the world's population before industrialization was organized in village communities with typical neighbourly help and at least a share of common land, pasture, forest, sacred and profane buildings; not without the use of currency, but mainly with little monetary exchange (Einzig 1966 [1949]).

Polanyi (2001 [1944]) described the modern tendency of *enclosure of the commons* in England, and David Bollier (2015) updated it for modern American readers: from the enclosure of land to the privatization of water and seeds, the prohibition of natural forms of treatment, food corporatism, copyright, and locked databases. In this context, Marx wrote about primordial or primitive accumulation, which was to occur in different forms in different parts of the world,

wherever people encountered the capitalist reasoning. The process was associated with "comprador elites", violence, expropriations, privatization (Marx 2012 [1867]: 585-622; cf. Polanyi 2001 [1944]; Hann and Hart 2009). When the principle of private property, administration and accumulation is consolidated and enshrined in law, it becomes self-evident and dominant.

Solidarity is a fundamental feature of every social and economic system, but its interpretation and implementation varies. It can focus on resources, production, exchange or consumption: solidarity models or projects address different segments of economic and social reproduction; they can be linked to the immediate living environment or invented (statistical); they can emerge from different forms of ownership; they may be ecologically sustainable or not; they can be European or non-European; agricultural or industrial, village or urban, old or new, in the form of gift or redistribution, etc. They take place at different levels of social organization, from the household to the European Union. Anthropology should therefore overcome its own scientific inertia and ideological oppositions and ask itself what different groups of people linked by interests, property, production, goods, kinship, ethnicity, language or otherwise actually do to sustain their existence?

Anthropology today all too often reproduces modern Cartesian *dualism*. One always rules over the other (mind-body, culture-nature, male-female, etc.). The dualisms are hierarchically structured, which has social, ecological, and political consequences: the privileging of one class, one sexuality (Derrida 1981) – and let us add, one dominant type of solidarity economy (entrepreneurship, corporatism, nationalism). Activists and solidarity-based economic anthropologists take the moral side of the underprivileged. Moving from moral dualism to *duality* - to the recognition of contradictions, yet not in their hierarchisation, but complementarity (Escobar 2018; cf. Granet 2007 [1933]) – would allow us to disseminate different solidarity economies in a horizontal and comparative arrangement from which we could build an anthropological theory of institutions and the human economy (Polanyi 1957; Hart, Laville, and Cattani 2010).

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Coping with the COVID-19 Pandemic as an elderly: The case of solidarity in the municipality of Tirana

Juliana Ajdini

Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tirana

Rudina Rama

Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tirana

Introduction

According to the UN (2012) the percentage of the global elderly population is expected to be more than 1.5 billion and double for those older than 65 in 2050. Most of the elderly live in Asia, followed by Europe and North America, and the fastest aging of the population is occurring in developed countries. Also, as a result of urbanization processes, the proportion of elderly living in urban areas is increasing worldwide (United Nations, 2012). Even Albania has begun to experience the effects of population aging as a result of several factors. Thus, the average life expectancy has been constantly increasing and there are more and more people who can and should continue to take an active part in society even after retirement age. In 2019, life expectancy at birth in Albania for the entire population was 79.0 years. It was 77.6 years for men and 80.6 years for women. This means that women are expected to live nearly 3 years longer than men. In 2019, Tirana was the county with the highest life expectancy at birth for men with 80.6 years and for women was with 84.4 years.

There are about 400,000 elderly people in Albania – 14 percent of the total population (INSTAT 2021). Elderly living alone or in poverty, which in interaction with various barriers (such as special health conditions or poor infrastructure) prevents full and effective participation in society[5].

Meanwhile, according to INSTAT (2021) on January 1, 2020, there were 478,850 young people under the age of 15 and 420,036 elderly people aged 65 or more in Albania. Also, according to the data of this institution, on January 1, 2020, the median age of the population is 37.2 years, from 36.7 on January 1, 2019. On January 1, 2020, the elderly dependency ratio (the ratio of the population 65+ with the population aged 15-64) has increased from 20.5% to 21.6% during the same period.

According to INSTAT, the number of inhabitants of Tirana is 900,661 thousand inhabitants, constituting about 31.8% of the total population, continuing to be one of the most populated regions of the country. On the other hand, the accelerated demographic transition is accompanied by a reduction of the family and its traditional supporting role for the elderly with special needs. Furthermore, unlike most countries in the region, Albania does not inherit from the past a traditional and integrated system of health and social care for the elderly.

These developments have led to the necessity of developing social services and drafting different policies to address the problems of aging in Albania. The very development of social services in our country has been included in a process of comprehensive reformation of the social care system during the last decades, bringing a new perspective in the design of policies, the establishment and provision of social services for groups in need, as well as determine the professionals who will provide these services and their training. Thus, in the framework of the Territorial Reform, local government units, municipalities have gained more powers in relation to the provision and provision of social welfare services. The municipalities of the country are involved in the process of preparing Social Plans, in which the needs and services for the third age will be included as part of the financial mechanism of the Social Fund.

In this context, the Municipality of Tirana has also drawn up the Social Plan of the Municipality (2018-2020) and the Action Plan of social inclusion (2018-2020). Both of these documents aim

[5]Assessment of social - economic conditions, social participation and health status of the elderly in Albania. Albanian Aging Network, October 2017.

not only to address the identified needs of marginalized groups, among them and the elderly, but also to define the challenges to be addressed in the future.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the measures taken by the Municipality of Tirana, Albania, to address the needs of the elderly during the isolation that came as a result of the Covid pandemic 19.

Objectives of the study:

- To measure the level of access and quality of service provision for the third age with a special focus on residential service, based on the legal framework, regulations and documents of the social plan and social inclusion.
- Provide recommendations for revising objectives and activities based on evidence and as needed.

The importance of the study

This study aims to shed light on the services to the elderly that are provided by the action plan and the plan of social inclusion in the municipality of Tirana. It explores the changes that have occurred in social services for the elderly, identifying the professionals who carry out needs assessments for the elderly, how they are translated into services/programs/policies in Tirana municipality. We hope that this study can contribute to a better understanding of the issues of the third age foreseen by the social plan and the plan of social inclusion in the municipality of Tirana, to promote the importance of the quality of these services and to identify the role of professionals in the whole process.

Literature review

In order to ensure the quality of life at all ages and to preserve autonomy, including health and well-being, Albania has prepared several legal regulations and standardized packages of services. In 2014, a new package of services was approved to be offered in all primary health care centers in Albania. The package was approved by a joint agreement of the Minister of Health and the

Director of the Compulsory Health Care Insurance Fund. The package includes a dedicated section (section 5) 'health care for the elderly'. It defines the 'friendly' health center for the elderly and requires the adaptation of the skills of the health personnel based on the needs of the elderly (over 65 years old). The aim of the services is to reduce complications and preserve health. The package contains 11 diagnosis and follow-up services as well as 15 prevention and counseling services for the elderly. Among the interventions defined for the first time are those of care at home and in the community, psychological assistance and monitoring of possible abuse.

Social Services for the Elderly in Albania

The Ministry of Health and Social Protection is the main institution, responsible for drafting and monitoring the implementation of policies for the protection, care and integration of the elderly. Social services for the elderly in the Republic of Albania are organized as follows:

- Social care services that are provided in public service centers such as community centers, residential centers, day centers or at home and are financed from the state budget and from the local budgets of local government bodies.
- Social care services provided in non-public (profit and non-profit) service centers.

At the national level, social services for the elderly provided through social care centers, of all types, constitute only 15%, namely 39 centers for the elderly in the whole country out of 259 service centers in Albania. So, the centers of social services for the elderly are insufficient, while their capacity is also limited to meet the needs for services. In the service of the elderly, there should be staffs with specialized employees for this type of service, multidisciplinary teams that carry out a personalized assessment of the needs of each elderly person and at the same time have drawn up an individual intervention plan to meet the identified needs. The personnel of social care service centers for the elderly (public centers) consists mainly of doctors and nurses, although the profession of social worker is also included in the organizational chart.

In the context of social services, the standards of care services for the needy categories have also been drawn up. The standards of services for the elderly serve as one of the basic instruments to guarantee the quality of services, as well as for the protection of the rights of the elderly in

accordance with all other legal documents[6]. The standards of social care services for the elderly in residential institutions are based on the well-known principles of social care such as: respect for values and individuality, universality, equality of opportunities, the right to benefit, partnership, transparency and impartiality, non-discrimination, social integration, independence and participation in community life.

Deinstitutionalization of social services

The reform of social care services is based on the principles of decentralization, deinstitutionalization and diversification of social care services. The new municipalities will be the main actors in the provision of social services at the local level. Thus, the new law No. 139/2015 "On Local Self-Government", charges local government units with a wide range of responsibilities in the field of social care services, as the most suitable level for providing social services to beneficiaries, due to their proximity to the community, in implementation of the principle of subsidiarity. Social care services include the provision of community social services, review and decision-making regarding custody procedures, as well as the management of residential services in specific cases. However, it should be emphasized that the possibilities of the municipalities for the establishment, administration and operation of social services for the elderly are limited by the lack of financial resources, despite the decentralization of powers. Thus, the study "Observation on local budgets spent on social care services in some municipalities of the country", supported by UNDP in 2018, showed that social care services in municipalities are almost completely financed by conditional funds. Financing from "unconditional funds" or "Municipality's own income" is almost negligible, about 2 to 3%, with the exception of Tirana, in which "Municipality's own income" covers 8% of the need.

Social Plan of the Municipality of Tirana (2018-2020)

The Municipality of Tirana social plan (2018-2020) defines the elderly as a group in need of social services, which for this group are particularly few. The latest data show that the number of elderly people in the country is increasing. Thus, in 2011, in Tirana, people aged 65 and over constituted

[6] VKM. No. 821. Date 06. 12.2006 For "Standards of social services for the elderly in residential centers".

about 10.2 percent of the entire population, and in 2031 it is predicted that this figure will reach 19 percent (INSTAT, UNFPA, 2015). This plan emphasizes the importance of greater attention to the elderly, as it finds that the existing services offered to you are very limited. PSBT proposes to create centers that will provide basic health services and socialization activities, as well as services at home for people who are unable to move. Addressing this goal, this plan also proposes the establishment of a network of volunteers.

Based on the basket of basic services, as well as the assessment of the needs for services in its territory and through discussions with staff and partners, the Municipality of Tirana listed in the Social Plan the following priorities in the development of existing social care services and new ones and reflects them those in the 2018-2020 action plan:

1. Development of existing services, where no service for the elderly is defined.
2. The development of new services , where it determines the establishment of services for the elderly (using also voluntary networks)

Also, the Municipality defined as goals the development of a series of collaborations with the Ministry of Education and Culture to develop new services:

- The drafting and signing of a cooperation agreement with the Ministry of Education and Culture for the establishment of a pilot model of the provision of services in the family (with priority for the disabled, the elderly)
- Conception of the pilot model of providing family services, its cost and its implementation.

In the social plan of Tirana Municipality, it is defined as the general objective “Improving existing social care services and setting up new services ". Precisely under this objective, the sub-objective “Development of pre-social services” has been defined, which defines as activities: the provision of family services; expanding the map of services for field teams; putting new teams into operation.

Methodology

The research method used in this study was the qualitative method. Literature review, secondary data analysis and qualitative methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation were part of

the study. The reason for their selection lies in the fact that they were the most appropriate methods in relation to the purpose and objectives of the study. The information that needed to be collected by the researcher for the realization of the study was of a theoretical and perceptual nature. The theoretical information was related to the search, identification and collection of information from the literature on the field and topic of the study. Perceptual information with participants' perceptions from their professional experiences in relation to the study issue.

The realization of the study has gone through several stages, specifically:

The first phase of the study is focused on the review of the literature on the development of housing services in Albania and in Tirana, in particular. The main documents, on which this component of the study was based, were social policies, national strategies, social plan and social action plan of Tirana municipality, national legislation, standards of social services, national and international studies and reports focusing on the purpose of the study . The literature review phase helped create a database of existing reports and studies on the issue. This analysis, on the one hand, helped to re-formulate the main research objectives of the study and, on the other hand, helped to design the research instruments. The second phase of the study was focused on the collection of primary data through semi-structured interviews with the main/key persons in the Municipality of Tirana and representatives of NGOs that focus on social services for the elderly, and in particular residential services. In the third and last phase of the study, the researcher focused on extracting the results, discussing them, as well as reaching conclusions and recommendations for the relevant institutions regarding the challenges of providing housing services in the municipality of Tirana.

Sampling

The participants in the study were key persons and relevant stakeholders in the field of providing social services to the elderly in the Municipality of Tirana. 11 participants took part in this study. The study used the avalanche method [7]in identifying key persons to be included in the interview. Some characteristics for the selection of subjects that were decided after the literature review were:

[7]A group of professionals were identified to begin the data collection process.

a. expertise in the field of social protection, social services for the elderly;

b. To represent the public and non-public social service for the elderly in Tirana municipality.

The following table presents the sampling size and the characteristics of the subjects included in the study.

Representative from the social service - Municipality of Tirana	**Representatives from Community Centers - Tirana Municipality**	**Representatives from civil society organizations**
- Municipality of Tirana (3)	• Multidisciplinary social center (3) • Skoze Community Center – (1) • "Gonxhe Bojaxhi" community center - (2)	- Ryder - Albania (1) - ASSETS (1)
3 participants	6 participants	2 participants

The average age of the study participants was 33 years. The participants in the study belonged to the age group of 26-40 years. Regarding the gender of the participants, only 1 of them was male. This also reflects a global trend of greater female presence in the social services sector.

Drafting and development of the interview

INSTRUMENT

As explained earlier, the second phase of the study focused on collecting primary data through semi-structured interviews with key persons. A total of 11 interviews were conducted. All interviews were conducted face to face (the interview period was February - March 2021). The average duration of an interview was 35 minutes. The interviews were conducted in neutral

environments, in order for the participants to feel in a comfortable position to answer the issues of interest. Semi-structured interviews have been chosen as a good approach to obtain information on a range of important issues. To answer the objectives of the study, two interview guides were developed: one for social service providers in Tirana municipality and one for those of NGOs.

The interview script consists of a series of open-ended questions, focusing on the following main topics:

- The services that the municipality of Tirana offers for the elderly;
- Organization of the multidisciplinary team;
- Knowledge of SP and residential service;
- Success cases and challenges;

An interview guide was prepared in advance, which laid out the key topics on which the interview would focus. The semi-structured interview guide was piloted by interviewing two subjects, these subjects were not included in the selected interviewee group, were not coded and were not used for analysis. After piloting the interviews and after consulting with professionals in the field, the guide was refined and took the full form, with which the study was carried out.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis process was performed by the researcher manually. Initially, the data collected through the interviews were all transcribed. Further, the researcher familiarized herself with all the collected data by reading and re-reading the transcripts. Based on the data, categories were identified and created using words or expressions. For this, the coding system of themes and concepts was used. According to Coffey and Atkinson (1996) the coding of qualitative data serves as a way to identify and re-arrange the data, thereby enabling the data to be seen in a new and different way. The coding system was developed to best fit the objectives of the study

Ethical considerations

Scientific research involves human subjects, so it must be careful in respecting ethical principles. In this study, important attention has been paid to these ethical principles:

- Respect and dignity for study participants - this is a very important principle for creating the climate necessary to obtain data. In a qualitative study, this aspect becomes even more important.
- Giving informed consent - Informed consent is increasingly important to qualitative research (Miller, Birch, Mauthner & Jessop, 2012). An informed consent format was developed for this issue.
- Confidentiality - For the protection of the identity of the participants in the study as well as the preservation and confidentiality of the data for each participant, codes were used. The collected data was stored as confidential material in a highly secure location selected by the applicant.
- Scientific Accuracy - Scientific accuracy focused on the accuracy of the steps taken in the study as well as avoiding any type of falsification or fraud.

Results and discussion

If we focus on our goal, we will have to emphasize that in Social Plan there is only one objective, which envisages developing a service in the future, it is not clear who will be the staff and the cost of this service, and therefore it is difficult to evaluate the result.

The study showed that the earthquake of November 26, 2019 and the Covid-19 pandemic announced in Albania in March 2020 were very well managed by TIRANA MUNICIPALITY in terms of the purpose of our study. Thus, the General Directorate of Social Services in TIRANA MUNICIPALITY has undertaken a series of concrete steps to remodel and strengthen even more the services to the third age, especially the lonely elderly, through the establishment of innovative services that respond to their concrete needs. , as is the service in the apartment. In this context, the Municipality of Tirana has been one of the winning municipalities in relation to the best practices, precisely with the initiative "Adopt a Grandma, Adopt a Grandfather" starting from the situation created as a result of Covid-19. The municipality of Tirana faced a large number of phone calls and referrals, coming from family members in emigration, from other cities or from a long distance; where it was determined that about 3654 lonely elderly people needed care and various services. As a result, the necessity arose to create a mechanism to come to the aid of

elderly people in need as soon as possible near their homes, where services such as food, medicine, pension, psychosocial support, etc., were transferred/offered through social workers and young people. Volunteer in the apartment. As part of this process;

1. The elderly and lonely pensioners were identified who were reported to the Green number 0800 0888, email info@tirana.al , Co-Government Platform, My Tirana Application, Posta and Posta e Mayor, but also to other reporters such as: social networks, Police Municipalities, NGOs, citizens, reports that have been referred for treatment to each administrative unit/neighborhood of the Municipality of Tirana, except for cases that were known by the structures on the ground, since about 520 elderly people access daily services near our Community Centers
2. Intervention plans were drawn up for each beneficiary in the 27 administrative units, and the staff of the Multifunctional Community Centers were mobilized, since a significant number of elderly people are beneficiaries of these services;
3. They were assisted with help and care
4. Collaborated with civil society, the city's business community

Important:

- Social Plan of Tirana Municipality is supported in the legal framework, but **has a limited focus on the elderly,** both in the approaches of services and their development.
- Social services for the elderly in PS should be based on needs assessments and be accompanied by cost of activities.
- Social services for the elderly must rely on a professional, stable, well-trained and motivated staff.

Tirana Municipality's interventions continue to improve care and social protection services for lonely elderly people, and more specifically the Municipality of Tirana through the call for applications for CSOs, as part of the Social Fund, November 2020, part of the "Social Care for Families and Children" program " prioritized among the 5 priority areas the elderly in need.

Important:

In fulfillment of this objective of the study, it is recommended that Municipality of Tirana, in the new social plan, consider:

- More focus on the elderly;
- More clarity on the forms of targeted services;
- More concrete activities on the way to achieve the set objectives;
- Cost of services.

Access of the elderly to social services and their quality

Services offered to the elderly in Tirana Municipality

Law no. 121/2016 "On social care services in the Republic of Albania" has emphasized the importance of community services to meet the needs of community members, with special characteristics, which makes them more vulnerable in relation to other citizens. For this purpose, it is intended to establish a regulated model for the operation of Multidisciplinary Community Centers (MCCs). The MCCs model, in order to better address the identified needs of the local community, has been designed with the features of flexible, important and acceptable services by the local community where it will be implemented. In order to ensure the effectiveness of the Multidisciplinary Community Centers (MCCs), the standards for the provision of these services have been drawn up. The MCCs model and service standards constitute the right tool in the hands of local government bodies, the Centers themselves, but also internal or external monitoring mechanisms, to realize the purpose of law no. 121/2016: "giving assistance in the well-being and social inclusion of individuals and families in need of social care", even as far as possible the creation of uniform good practices.

The study indicated that currently the elderly in the territory of the Municipality of Tirana access multifunctional community services in the 5 Community Centers of the Municipality of Tirana.

- Multidisciplinary social center
- Shkoze Community Center

- "Stay together" social center
- "Shelter Tirana" social center
- "Gonxhe Bojaxhi" community center

Reorganization of Social Centers into Community Centers

The General Directorate of Social Services, through its structures, realizes and manages the social service for the categories at risk, ensuring that the services offered are appropriate, effective, accessible and comprehensive. Through these programs, the rights and standards of assistance and care for individuals and groups in need are guaranteed. By Decision no. 67, dated 12.06.2020 for "Reorganization of the Social Centers of Tirana Municipality into Community Centers", respectively The vision of Community centers is to create a society with individuals reintegrated into social life who interact with each other in a society of healthy. The centers have been reorganized with a Board of Directors made up of holders of various social structures, but also with representation from the community. These structures are functional in support of the daily activities of the Community Centers which were reorganized by expanding the range of daily services in a time slot from Monday to Friday, 8:00 - 20:00 and Saturday 09:00-14:00. So, in addition to the existing services, these Centers, with their reorganization, offer additional multifunctional services responding to the needs of the community where they operate, such as the formation of after-school classes for the children of families on economic assistance, the organization of extracurricular courses (painting, music, sports etc.), provision of psychosocial services in the residence, the establishment of various forms of social character with representatives from the community and the institution of the Municipality with the aim of citizen interaction for increasing the quality of services with higher standards towards the community.

Access

The study showed that not all the elderly have the opportunity to access the services of the Central Committee. There are several reasons mentioned by the study participants. The main reason mentioned was the distance (CC are far from residential centers, where the elderly also

have their own apartments). Having a service car near the CC would facilitate the access of the elderly near them. Another reason, mentioned by representatives of NGOs, was that the elderly themselves are not always familiar with the services offered. The CC should develop communication strategies with communities that include, among others, increased visibility and family visits. It was interesting that some participants, when asked about the access of the elderly to the services that TIRANA MUNICIPALITY offers, mentioned stigma. There seems to be a general prejudice that the beneficiaries of the CC should only be members of marginalized communities or individuals in need.

Quality

Law no. 121/2016 "On social care services in the Republic of Albania" has emphasized the importance of community services to meet the needs of community members, with special characteristics, which makes them more vulnerable in relation to other citizens. For this purpose, it is intended to establish a regulated model for the operation of Multidisciplinary Community Centers (MCCs). In general, CCs are composed of social workers, psychologists, therapists, medical staff and lawyers. Their activity is determined by the standards for the functioning of the centers.

Social Plan is known by the participants in the study. The participants state that they have the human resources to provide quality service to the elderly, but they need support. Services are provided by the multidisciplinary team. Family service is assessed as challenging (it was practiced during the pandemic and there was no previous model to base it on). Cooperation with NGOs is appreciated.

During the pandemic, Tirana Municipality in cooperation with various NGOs offered the following services to the elderly:

- supply and distribution of ready meals at home;
- supply of drugs or other supplies;
- maintaining personal hygiene:
- fulfillment of other daily needs, according to assessment, case by case;

- Psycho-social support (continuous counseling line, information and support).

Conclusion and recommendations

The municipality of Tirana, through its social plan 2018-2020, has foreseen the elderly as a group in need. In order to increase the quality and quantity of services to them, Tirana Municipality in Social Plan has proposed to raise the service to the residence through a network of volunteers. Such an objective requires more clarification on how volunteers will be recruited, how they will be motivated and above all how their sustainability will be ensured considering the fact that they are a very mobile category in the labor market. The management of the difficult situations that our country faced at the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020 proved that our municipalities, as institutions responsible for providing community services, have a lot to do. From the monitoring carried out, several challenges were identified, the addressing of which would increase the quality of the service and the access of the elderly to these services.

Determination of dedicated personnel and organization of systematic visits (monthly to the homes of the elderly with loss of autonomy and at least 2 visits per year to the homes of the elderly over 80 years old, regardless of the degree of autonomy), including health care nurses principal and social workers. Assessment of conditions at home, preparation of home care plans and support, where necessary, of caregivers with instructions for specialized services such as catheter replacement, treatment of chronic wounds, etc.

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Making shoes in the middle of periphery: solidarity economy from women - for women

Nataša Bokan

Faculty of Agriculture, University of Zagreb

Introduction

The sprawl of solidary economy throughout globe comprises the plethora of initiatives in a myriad of fields, from agriculture and food provision to design and IT sector, from community supported agriculture and artisanal beer social enterprise to programmers' or designers' cooperatives. Solidarity practices in the field of economics have of course always existed, but they have multiplied in recent decades as a reaction to the globalization of local economies and the loss of many patterns and practices that were taken for granted before globalization. In late modernization, through anti-globalization and then alter-globalization movements, local territorial identities and practices begin to be affirmed and reaffirmed in different ways. They sprout from different motivations, sometimes it is the protection of biodiversity, sometimes it is some kind of environmental justice, sometimes it is the supply of local or organic food, the revitalization of local crafts and the introduction of local currency, sometimes it is the empowerment of women to enter entrepreneurship and local politics. In any case, when local economies around the world begin to apply some form of solidarity principles, they begin the transition which we are talking about in this book. The particular case we want to talk about here comes at the time of the new European rural policy, which clearly emphasizes the role of gender equality in rural areas. Numerous projects are currently being funded at all levels to promote gender equality in rural contexts, however, there is always a question of projectification going there where the capacity for getting the funding exists. But what about other, deep peripheral communities without aptitude to 'draw the resources'?

In our endeavour of mapping solidarity economy actors and pioneers in Croatia, we found the social entrepreneurships are some of the most innovative actors in the field of pursuing solidarity economy practices. In the last decade, there is an emergence of different kinds of social entrepreneurships over the country. In this paper we will present the example of social entrepreneurship *Održivo društvo* emerged from deep rural periphery of Zadar County. Non-governmental organization (NGO) which founded social entrepreneurship in Gračac, employing several low employable workers addresses a salient however in many aspects invisible issue of interlocked social setting of class, gender, and social environment. Through the case of NGO *Prospero* and its social entrepreneurship we will analyse how rural women employment in hand with socially responsible production in rural periphery changes the perspective of otherwise socially excluded women severely exposed to overall lack of perspective. We conducted the qualitative research and collected data using the semi-structured interview with the social entrepreneurship's head and employees. The field research was conducted in autumn 2021 in the Lika region and its outskirts. Our research questions were focused on finding what kind of social enterprise or association has been developed, and more important, how those actors or businesses affect social issues in the context they are immersed in and how those changes in (e.g. gender relations) become the driving force of change in local community. It seems that when the state becomes absent from a small rural community, one can only hope that civil society will appear and compensate for some of the services that this community needs.

Solidarity economy in rural context

Solidarity economy is focused on social justice, and it tackles the increase of social inequality and social exclusion, discrepancies between classes and societies, and ecological crisis and its challenges. Weakening of the welfare state indirectly transfers the responsibility to civil society to fulfil that gap, by solving old or new social needs. In our endeavour of mapping solidarity economy actors in Croatia, continuing in a way the work of previous authors who pioneered these issues (Puđak and Šimleša, 2020; Bušljeta Tonković et al., 2018; Šimleša et al., 2016) we noticed the increase of social entrepreneurship as one of the forms of solidarity economy, which has become global in the first decade of this century.

However, movements for solidarity in the rural context largely deal with the social and economic position of peasants, local, sustainable agriculture, and access to local resources and local food. For example, the food sovereignty movement is aimed, *inter alia*, at the access and the right to agricultural land, a fairer income for farmers and better quality and more accessible food for citizens, as well as keeping money in the local community while preserving the environment. A considerable number of civil initiatives have been engaged around this goal in Croatia, and since the pandemic, some local administrations or other institutions have also been involved. And it really is an indispensable part of sustainable and solidary practices.

Nevertheless, when talking about rural areas, agriculture is a framework that sometimes obscures other aspects of rural life. Agriculture has long had an exclusive position in rural policy, still usually referred to as agricultural policy, so that other rural issues have often been neglected. Leaving the agricultural topics aside, we refer to the rural context in terms of civil engagement in the pursuit of better circumstances for rural women in a rural hinterland of South Lika.

Layers of periphery

One of the important concepts for our research here is the concept of (rural) periphery. It is seemingly "self-understandable and non-problematic, although a lot of research point out that it is multi-faceted and complex" (Nejašmić et al., 2018:87). The dominant discourse since the 1960s is the centre-periphery model which influenced models of periphery in later decades. The oldest dimension in identifying periphery is spatial dimension which explains the periphery by natural-geographic factors such as physical distance and transport accessibility. New ways of thinking about transport accessibility as a key dimension of peripherality were influenced by the idea of spatial-temporal convergence as a decrease in time needed to travel from point A to point B primarily as a consequence of technical-technological innovation where "places converge in time-space" and where it becomes important the dimension of experience which contributed in the last decades to the use of non-spatial indicators of peripherality such as IT infrastructure or human and social capital.

Therefore, in looking into the periphery there is a need for an integral or holistic approach, where we can use various dimensions when explaining the context of the specific periphery (Nejašmić

et al., 2018). This research partly reflects this multi-dimensional model of understanding the periphery, which includes both objective and subjective factors.

In Croatia, with very few exceptions, rural *is* periphery. What makes Lika a periphery, is underdeveloped infrastructure, decades of depopulation (negative net migration balance, natural population decline, and population ageing), uneven spatial development, unemployment, inadequate governance, the least developed civil society. Regarding subjective indicators, there is a feeling of 'nowhere', of neglect, of far hinterland which we detected in our fieldwork.

Uneven spatial development is not specific only for Croatia, it is also present elsewhere in Europe, analyses of development disparities in Slovenia (Cosier et al., 2014), Slovakia (Plešivčák and Buček, 2017), spatial inequalities in Romania (Török, 2013) and also in highly-developed European countries such as Germany, where it has been a push factor of internal migrations and depopulation processes in less-developed areas of the former Democratic Republic of Germany for decades (Fendel, 2016).

However, for the last two decades the natural population change in Lika has continually been negative, and strong emigration has again come to the fore in the recent period, which will certainly have long-term consequences, particularly since a considerable part of the emigrating population are younger adults (Klempić Bogadi and Lajić, 2014). Furthermore, the Census 2021 showed even deeper depopulation, now Lika, being the largest county by area, is having the only 8 inh/km2 (square km), which is the lowest density in country.

Restructuring the rural area in the last thirty years hashad vast consequences on basic as well as social infrastructure and on economic opportunities for ever decreasing population. The War in the 1990s with out-migrations and non-rehabilitated social relations between ethnic communities on one hand, deindustrialisation, changing the administrative borders opposing to traditional cultural regions on the other, altogether pushed the municipality of Gračac even further to the periphery. Gračac and its surrounding is culturally a part of traditional region of Lika, however, since the 1990s it is administratively a part of the Zadar County. It helped the estranging Gračac from the cultural centre in Lika and has not established vital economic, social and cultural relations with Zadar. Overall neglect by policy and administration brought Gračac to

circumstances of low employment, aging population and civil engagement with minimal or no support from local government.

Making shoes in the middle of periphery

The context of Gračac, as the biggest municipality by area in Croatia, larger even than some counties, is entangled by remoteness, passivity, and traditionalism. Beside insufficient infrastructure, unemployment, remote and passive social setting appears through political invisibility of civil social actors and traditionalism of gender roles. Social expectations within the family or beyond one were strong and rigid throughout 1990s and early 2000s. There are twice weaker chances for women in rural Lika to earn the university diploma than for those in urban areas (Bokan, 2021). Consequently, the unemployment rates are higher for women than those for men, making the women's social position prone to high level of social exclusion.

Contributing to this are numerous obstacles that prevent women's equal participation in economic and social life at various levels. Economic barriers are most evident in poor access to employment and education, lack of access to property and land, which is also related to access to finance, and women's disproportionately higher participation in informal and unpaid work. Structural barriers refer to all those obstacles found in legislation or in practice, i.e. the policy framework that does not implement gender equality deeply enough, then stereotypes about women in science and technology, lack of support for women with two jobs (one at home and one outside the home). In addition, there are so-called soft barriers such as lack of networking, lack of education and training, and lack of role models, the impression that women are not willing to take risks, and the traditional role of women, which is even more pronounced in rural areas.

The NGO *Prospero* was established in 2003, having organized educational workshops with the significant increase around 2009 and 2010 in frequency and scope of programs. The first workshops were those for weaving, felting, ceramics, and pottery which were followed by programs of learning foreign languages and computer skills, tourist guiding. Women from the local community were attendants and they gained several types of skills over the years. The organization itself and women who became the part of the community around organization through trainings and volunteering, developed their skills and organically exceeded the skills from

the first years and expand their interests for the production of shoes. The same NGO established the social enterprise in the last months of 2018. First year was focused on acquisition of machinery and 2020 was the first year of production. As it turned out, 2020 was unfortunate enough with the COVID-19 pandemic to hinder or postpone the initial momentum. Since early 2022, however, Prospero and his social enterprise have been noticed by reporters and the press has been interested in their work ever since. At the same time, the production has been enhanced.

However, most of the women included in trainings and subsequently in social enterprise got caught up in the war during high school and many did not graduate. Therefore, when about 20 women went through different types of training, their status began to change in many ways. Since they had only completed elementary school up to that point, acquiring a qualified education was a significant step forward for all of them in terms of their employment prospects. They became employable and gained self-esteem as a result.

What changes have training, volunteering and subsequent employment in a social enterprise brought for women? The first important consequence is the acquisition of various skills in production (from souvenirs to shoes), IT, planning and management of businesses and projects. Of the skills that come from working with others, communication skills are the most important. The possibility of employment is another important change that would not have occurred without the formal skills that the women acquired through the association. Apart from the mere fact that they got a job, the fact that their salary is not minimal is also important on a symbolic level. The amount is certainly not high but compared to other jobs available to women in the community, these amounts are significantly higher. This also gives women symbolic importance and has a positive impact on their self-esteem and social status within the family and the community as a whole. Socialization in the work environment is also one of the factors that undoubtedly improve the status of women. So we can say that their status changes both objectively and subjectively. Objectively, women acquire qualifications, get a job, bring money to the family, gain economic independence, have a place and role in the community. On a subjective level, their self-confidence increases, they get a sense of achievement, they contribute to the business, to the family, and finally to the local community.

As for changes in the community, from the perspective of our participants, the social environment has changed in some ways over the past twenty years. Of course, it would be presumptuous to claim that Prospero caused all these changes, but it seems that it certainly shaped and encouraged them. The changes were party also caused by the economic crisis, which seemingly loosened strict gender roles and "freed" women from contributing exclusively through informal, unpaid work in private sphere. In any case, from a social group that was highly unemployable and, apart from formal qualifications, had no support within the family to find a job outside the home, a new employment pattern emerged in the local community that "allowed" them to "both work" (husband and wife). This social enterprise was born out of local needs, and working in this enterprise gave the women a perspective. Through their skills they got a job, through the work they got empowerment, through the collective they got a professional and supporting community and an active role in society beyond the private one. In this way, this social enterprise becomes an important social actor in changing gender relations in the deep rural periphery.

An important finding is also the one that refers to the source or the motivator of the changes that started and developed the whole project of the education of women and their gradual employment. She is an enthusiastic individual who made the difference by compensating for the lack of programs and projects and also the elementary interest of the local administration in solving the needs of the local population.

"*I have lived in Zagreb... and I have seen how it is when you come from that environment - almost nowhere, in 1996 there was a single shop and a single café, and then you think what you could change because life there is almost unbearable for you, and yet those who are there are used to it, and they are not the ones who dig with their hands and feet to make something, to fix something*" (SE leader)

"*Through the projects, [I was] in favor of women getting a job or self-employment, so they could have some security and money, so they could feel they were contributing*."

"*All these women who have gone through different trainings, over time they have weaved less and moved to shoes, we have learned how to make shoes, how to sew, and they have received*

certificates for that, and now these 20 or so women are slowly being employed, now we have 7 employees"

Gračac was lucky enough to have this key individual, but if we speak from the perspective of development and endogenous governance of rural communities, relying on an enthusiastic person is at the same time very good and very bad news. When we see what one person is capable of accomplishing, we cannot help but wonder what else could have been accomplished in the last two decades if local authorities had also been involved in similar projects on this scale. On the other hand, the bad news is that if we leave development prospects only to extraordinary individuals who work miracles despite the lack of support, we leave local rural development to mere luck whether such a person shows up or not.

Concluding remarks

The feeling of living "behind God's back" is the general feeling of the women from this community. From the point of view of the women interviewed, the local government seems to be passive and does not provide logistical support to the social enterprise or other NGOs that have emerged from the same organization. Nonetheless, the community around Prospero and its enterprise has developed and gone its own way, regardless of local disdain.

There are several focal points from the findings. Traditional and economically rather devitalised rural community experienced slow, gradual however substantial change for local women but for the community as a whole. What happened was a value change in women employment patterns – „both of them working now". What started like harmless feminine hobby, grew in something more and gradually changed women status within the household and local community. The social enterprise also initiated, encouraged, or established other NGOs which are now addressing other social needs in local community, like assisting the elder people in their households. Additionally, important finding is that the driver of all these changes is one person - a woman with huge motivation to change „almost unbearable - nowhere". Therefore, an enthusiastic individual which made so much difference in two decades stands in the opposite of the uninterested or absent quiet local government.

Our findings have shown that the main initiator of local initiatives is an enthusiastic individual who often experiences more obstacles than support from local authorities. However, recognizing the considerable obstacles faced by unemployed women and creating conditions for some of them to develop production in a solidarity and cooperative manner shows how the solidarity economy can unlock the perspective of socially excluded classes in the rural periphery. Through the training, volunteering and work in the NGO and social enterprise, the transformation took place in an objective and subjective way. Through this work, these women develop their skills, they are involved in the design and production process, they do it together, they are supported to make decisions and they become a true collective. Therefore, this work became a perspective that gradually brought about changes in various fields. The acquisition of skills, having a job, having a profession, financially providing for the family, being empowered and being a part of the collective – all exceptionally relevant preconditions for social inclusion.

These changes become a driving force for promoting civic engagement, for changing the status of women, who not only become gainfully employed, but are also a driving force for further change. These women, who were unemployed and housewives, are now creating change in the local community. Rephrasing Defourny and Nyssens (2012), grassroots social enterprises have a chance to endure and thrive even when the fashion is gone. It is likely that entrepreneurship that emerges from the local context will persist as long as it is needed to meet local needs. Therefore, rootedness in the local context, along with solidarity and inclusion goals, proves to be the best initial impetus for meeting specific local needs.

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Fostering solidarity through education: social entrepreneurship education in Europe and Croatia

Marijana Bokun

Association for Creative Social Work (Zagreb, Croatia)

Danijel Baturina

Study Centre for Social Work, Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb

Introduction

The main goal of the endeavors of social entrepreneurship[8] is to create a positive social impact. The prioritization of pursue social change or addressing social needs is the key difference between entrepreneurship in the business sector and social entrepreneurship is that the latter (Austin, et al., 2006.; Peredo & McLean, 2006.; Mair & Martí, 2006). Social entrepreneurship is an entrepreneurial dynamic/trend. Sometimes, social entrepreneurship is viewed as a panacea that should eliminate market failures and ensure wellbeing of people and the planet. Others see it as proof that business models are taking over all aspects of life (Nicholls, 2006). It stays contested concept (Teasdale, et al., 2021) but it growing phenomenon worldwide (Defourny et al., 2018) and there is a growing recognition of social enterprises across Europe (ICF, 2014.; European Commission, 2021).

Social entrepreneurship education (SEE) is recognized as one of the key ingredients for developing the sector (European Commission, 2020.; European Commission 2021). Entrepreneurship education has rapidly gained prominence in last decades as area of study (Thomsen et al., 2019). On the other hand, the inclusion of social entrepreneurship and related

[8] More on historical development of the social entrepreneurship in Teasdale et al., 2021,. Teasdale et al., 2022b and Baturina & Babić, 2021.

phenomena in formal education was initiated several decades ago although only recently have began to spread among most EU Member States. (Bokun, 2022.; European Commision, 2020)[9].

Education is closely related to social progress as it is key to maintaining a competitive labor force in an increasingly globalized economy. It is developing skills and understanding of the importance of participation in civic life, it cultivates life skills to expand our knowledge as well as realize our full potential and it is most effective means for creating a level playing field and reducing the impact of social injustices and social exclusion (Spiel et al. 2018).

Social enterprises demand a unique set of skills to maintain an economically viable business while upholding a social mission (OECD, 2022.b). As a specific form of education, social entrepreneurship education has a difficult task to reconcile the entrepreneurship and social aspects of social enterprises work and provide skills and knowledge to be a factor in the future promotion and future sustainability of the social.

The goal of the chapter is to analyze the characteristics and trends of social entrepreneurship education in Europe and Croatia. The first part of the chapter will give a short overview of the development and importance of social entrepreneurship education as a groundwork for the analysis. Afterward analysis of social entrepreneurship education will be presented. It will focus on different dimensions such as education levels, type of programs, and trends and will give analytical insights on the European level and specifically in Croatia. The discussion will be orientated towards assessing the importance of social entrepreneurship education, highlighting its possible contribution to social entrepreneurship field and wider. In the concluding part of the chapter, we will summarize the key aspects and reflect on the potential future developments.

Development and importance of social entrepreneurship education

Social entrepreneurship education has been developing slowly. One of the reasons is that until the 90s, there was an opinion that people could not be taught how to become a social entrepreneur. Because of this, there was a certain amount of suspicion towards the possibilities

[9] In higher education world renowned universities such as Harvard, Stanford, and Berkeley were the first to offer courses in social entrepreneurship in the 1990s and Europe quickly followed suit. Since then, there has been an explosion of courses in the in social entrepreneurship (Brock & Steiner, 2009).

of social entrepreneurship education." In spite of this notion, Leadbeater (1997) considered that people can still be taught certain skills that social entrepreneurs need for success in their own venture (Kedmenec, Rebernik & Tominc, 2016.; Vidović, 2012.; Toplek, 2019). So in 1993, Harvard Business School launched the "Social Enterprise Initiative" - a pioneering program of research and study of this new form of entrepreneurship.

In the mid-1990s, Gregory Dees, was the first at Harvard University who introduced the subject of Social Entrepreneurship and held his first lectures on this topic. This was a strong influence that marked an entrance of this term into the academic community. After Harvard, other highly respected American universities and colleges, such as Columbia, Stanford, Berkeley and Yale, began to follow the same path (Kedmenec et al., 2016.; Vidović, 2012). Since then, there has been an explosion of courses in social entrepreneurship (Brock & Steiner, 2009) and concept of social entrepreneurship began to be introduced into the educational and scientific systems of various European universities. Many professors and researchers focused their interest in this form of entrepreneurship. The first documented lecture dates from 2003, and it is a collaboration between Maximilian Martin from the University of Geneva and Pamela Hartigan, a member of the Schwab Foundation. Further development of educational programs for social entrepreneurship was most noticeable in Great Britain, France, Belgium and Italy (Brock & Steiner, 2009; Vidović, 2012).

Studies suggest that higher rates of education will lead to higher rates of entrepreneurship (for example: Kolvereid & Moen, 1997.; Dobele, 2016.; Ahn & Winters, 2021.) and better performance in entrepreneurial activities (GEM research, CEPOR, 2021.; Hunady et al., 2018.)

In EU policies education for entrepreneurial competences has a high priority especially since 2006 when entrepreneurial competences were defined as a key lifelong competence (Singer et al., 2021). Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan (European Commision, 2013) highlights work needed to ensure that being an entrepreneur is an attractive prospect for Europeans which also includes social entrepreneurs whose potential is often underestimated. It also invites member states to develop social entrepreneurship education and training. The European Agenda for Entrepreneurship (2004) outlines a program to encourage entrepreneurship and create a more

favorable entrepreneurial climate, and it mentions social entrepreneurship as one of the types of entrepreneurship that addresses open social issues (Zrilić & Širola, 2014).

SEE is studied in varieties of geographical contexts related to program goals and curricular content (Mirabella & Young, 2012). For example Ndou (2021) analyzed ten European social entrepreneurship courses and programs and recognized some patterns of social entrepreneurship education regarding learning goals, entrepreneurship content, learning approach and stakeholder's engagement.

However, social entrepreneurship is still marginally represented in education, and due to its complexity and insufficient research, it often appears only as a sporadic subject taught as part of other related subjects such as: business economics, management, entrepreneurship and similar social subjects (Brock & Steiner, 2009.; Vidović, 2012). Social entrepreneurship education can give the individual an ability to see entrepreneurship opportunities in any area and evaluate these opportunities as well as develop the individual's ability to combine sources effectively (Dobele, 2016). Besides prompting individuals to start a social enterprise, social entrepreneurship education also equips the individual with social characteristics and gives them an idea how to develop society. Social entrepreneurship education could potentially result in different benefits for the wider society. Therefore, given the lack of research on the topics, it is important to analyze the status and trends of social entrepreneurship education.

Analysis of social entrepreneurship education: levels, programs, trends

This analysis of social entrepreneurship education is based on the desk research- analysis of 35 collective comparative reports of the European Commission on social enterprises and their ecosystem in Europe, various authors, detailed in the list of references. The analysis will be based on several dimensions - education levels, type of programs, and main trends of development of SE education in Europe.

First, regarding the level of education and types of programs, the inclusion of social entrepreneurship and related phenomena in formal education is visible only recently in most EU member states. In the EU curricula on social entrepreneurship and related fields now exist in mostly high-level educational institutions (Borzaga et al., 2020.; Bokun, 2022).

Table 3.1. EU countries are distributed by the level of education for social entrepreneurship

Level of education	Country
University programs/higher education only	Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Greece, Croatia, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Hungary, Malta, Germany, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom
From high school to higher education	Belgium, Estonia, Lithuania
From primary school to higher education	Denmark
From preschool to higher education	Netherlands
In the report of the European Commission on social enterprises and their ecosystem for these countries - the aspect of education for social entrepreneurship is not mentioned. The summary report lists a number of universities and other institutions that provide education for social enterprises for Albania and Turkey, while for North Macedonia it is stated that there are no plans and programs in higher education./ *non-EU countries participating in the EaSI program	Albania*, Montenegro*, Iceland*, Luxembourg, Norway*, North Macedonia*, Serbia*, Turkey*

Source: Authors own analysis

As we can see from table 3.1.: 22 countries have SE at university programs/higher education only. 3 countries have SE from high school level to higher education level. One country has SE from primary school to higher education and one country has SE as early as from preschool to high education. However, for 8 countries there isn't sufficient data about the level of SE so they cannot be included in the analysis.

We see can see how, for example, in Belgium, the development of education and training on social enterprises is at different levels, from high schools to universities and universities (Nyssens & Huybrechts ., 2020). In Bulgaria (Jeliazkova, 2019), several universities include social economy in their courses - more often as part of lectures on social policy and social work, but also as specialized courses focused on social economy. The Czech Republic (Fraňková, 2019) has over fifty undergraduate programs and an affinity for social enterprises. Students show an interest in

social enterprises, which is evident from the many papers already written on the subject from different perspectives. Developing a coherent study program to equip future social entrepreneurs with business skills and ideological grounding constitutes a long-term priority in this regard.[10]

In Denmark, educational programs related to social entrepreneurship and social innovation have become integrated into many different levels of the education system. In higher education, the Center for Social Entrepreneurship (CSE) at Roskilde University (Hulgård, & Chodorkof, 2019). In Estonia, Tallinn University has a special Master's program in Social Entrepreneurship launched in 2018. It focuses on project-based learning providing students with the knowledge and support to start their social enterprises (Reimann, 2019). As far as Greece is concerned, several newly founded institutions are promoting the learning and education of social entrepreneurship (Varvarousis & Tsitsirigkos, 2019). In Hungary, the growth of scientific research interest and educational programs for social entrepreneurship is visible, however, a more comprehensive program targeting social entrepreneurs is needed (Mihály & Kiss, 2019).

In Italy, education and training for social entrepreneurship are developed at different levels and with different durations. Several universities now offer courses and programs on social entrepreneurship and related topics (Borzaga, 2020.; Bokun, 2022). In the Netherlands, social responsibility has become a topic that is increasingly included in pre-schools, elementary-primary schools, and middle-high schools, and in line with this trend, some schools are involved in programs dedicated to social enterprises - for example through the program offered by Jong Ondernemen in cooperation with NN Social Innovation Relay (Bosma, 2019).

In Poland, there is a special "educational package" in the form of a manual for teachers prepared by the Council for Systemic Solutions in the Social Economy to promote social enterprises in primary and secondary schools. More recently, the National Social Economy Development Program envisages research into the core curriculum for general education to supplement the

[10] Good example of education for social entpreurship in this country could be that the Department of Environmental Studies at Masaryk University has started the process of accreditation of the joint master's study "Entrepreneurship driven by sustainability", which will be realized in a consortium with the Business University of Vienna and the University of Barcelona, with the support of the Erasmus Mundus program (Fraňková, E., 2019).

curriculum of the "Fundamentals of Entrepreneurship" course with information on the social economy and social enterprises (Ciepielewska-Kowalik, 2020).

In Portugal, programs are focused on practitioners or offered at postgraduate levels, although they recognize the need to generate social economy awareness among younger students. For example, one of the recommendations of the Social Economy Congress is the inclusion of social and solidarity economy issues and activities in schools (Ferreira, 2019). In the UK, in addition to several programs at the higher education levels, there are also several social enterprise-specific programs for potential and existing social entrepreneurs (Lyon, F. et al., 2019).

The previous analysis was based on the levels of education in the formal educational system. It is also important to mention that providers of social entrepreneurship education and training also exist outside formal educational institutions. (Borzaga et al., 2021).

In Slovenia and Slovakia, this role is played by regional development agencies. (Borzaga et al., 2021). In Bulgaria, Ireland and Germany there are summer educational camps about SE organized by NGOs (Jeliazkova, 2019.; O'Shaughnessy, 2020.; Ravensburg et al., 2018). In Estonia, there is a network of social enterprises offering various development programs. In Croatia, there is learning about social entrepreneurship through student cooperatives at the elementary and high school levels. In Sweden, public high schools and informal study associations conduct the education of interest for social entrepreneurship (Gawel, 2019).

Analysis showed that education for social entrepreneurship in EU countries ranges from courses and modules to full programs and is available via online learning or distance learning and blended learning platforms. It is found on different levels, from regular undergraduate subjects to graduate and postgraduate levels. There are also some good examples of online universities with dedicated social entrepreneurship curricula are: The Open University in the United Kingdom and UNED in Spain (Borzaga et al., 2020.; Bokun, 2022). It is worth mentioning the arrival of social entrepreneurship programs in primary and secondary schools in countries such as Belgium, Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom (Borzaga et al., 2021.; Bokun, 2022).

Another aspect of our analysis is related to trends of SE education in Europe (see Annex 1. which shows level of SE recognition, size of the SE sector, main SE characteristics, and main SE ED characteristics per each analysed country).

The detailed analysis of the main trends shows a discrepancy in the development of education for social entrepreneurship, which is close to the state of development of the sector. More developed and with more social enterprises also tend to have more developed education for social entrepreneurship. For example, Belgium, France, Italy, and the United Kingdom are among the countries with a long-standing tradition of social enterprise education and training at higher education institutions. Of course, the question is whether education for social entrepreneurship followed the development of the sector or appeared consequently, inspired by growth of the sector that has put pressure for the development of specific education.

Some countries have a relatively low recognition and SE size. In these countries, the sector is not on high level of development and and education programs for social entrepreneurship appear mainly at higher education institutions, with sporadic ones in the third sector (examples can be Malta, Albania). Countries, such as Croatia (Vidović, 2019), the Czech Republic and Slovenia, have also in recent years developed university curricula on social entrepreneurship reaching graduate and postgraduate levels (Borzaga et al.; 2021; Bokun, 2022).

The third aspect is the countries that have an average level of recognition and low to medium size of the sector. There the situation is diverse. We mainly notice education at the higher education level in (for example in, Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, Poland). But some have also recorded expansion beyond higher education into secondary education or capacity building for practitioners (such as Portugal or part of Latvia). In some countries, examined research does not mention education for social entrepreneurship (such as Iceland or Montenegro, North Macedonia).

Social entrepreneurship education in Croatia

Social enterprises as a specific area of practice are a relatively new phenomenon in Croatia, still in the phase of progressive development (Vidović, 2019). Approximately two decades ago, the promotion of social entrepreneurial activity in Croatia began (Vidović, 2012.; Vidović and Baturina, 2021).

Strategy for the development of Social Entrepreneurship in the Republic of Croatia for the period of 2015 – 2020 was delivered in 2015 and was a key moment for the recognition of social

entrepreneurship in the Croatian context. One of the four measures was "Promoting the importance and role of social entrepreneurship through all forms of education" (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2015). Financial allocation for this measure was 75 million HRK (approximately 10 million EUR). A large number of activities were planned in this area[11]

Strategy overestimated possibilities and political will for the development of the sector (Baturina, 2018) and in the end, most of the measures were not implemented, including those related to education. Therefore, the Strategy did not have a significant impact on the development of the sector (Vidović 2019.; Vasseur et al., 2021) in this and others.

Despite the lack of institutional and financial support and existing legal disadvantages, interest in social entrepreneurship and social enterprises is still growing in several areas of the ecosystem. We are witnessing the emergence of new social enterprises, new courses and educational programs, some social enterprise incubators and accelerators, and other financial and support programs, developed mainly in an intermediary sector (Ferreira et al, 2019.; Vidović, 2019).

Specifically, regarding education, we may say that several aspects of education are slowly developing. In the secondary level of education, student cooperatives can be a potential for developing knowledge on cooperatives and social entrepreneurship, and their growth has been noticeable in the last few years (Vidović, 2020). [12] In addition, social entrepreneurship was part of a draft of the Comprehensive educational reform (as the intersection of entrepreneurship and sustainable development) (Vidović, 2019), but Civic education is still not fully implemented at the secondary level of education.

On the higher level of education, there are some positive developments as more and more faculties are in some way engaging with the topics of social entrepreneurship, either by having specific courses or making these topics part of other courses (Vidović, 2019.; Baturina & Babić, 2021). There is a balance between courses held on economics and other social faculties.[13] Some

11 Nine of them related to support for the development of education for social entrepreneurship at different levels, the development of various programs from innovative to those of lifelong education, and support for promotion, information, and training.

[12] However, it is also noted that some cooperative principles, such as cooperative education, are insufficiently reflected in the work of student cooperatives. (Vidović, 2020).

[13] An overview of the courses and faculties Involved in social entrepreneurship education could be found in Bokun (2022), Baturina & Babić (2021), & Vidović (2019). Among others, they note the Faculty of Political Sciences in Zagreb, Faculty of Law in Zagreb - Social Work Study Center, Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences, Faculty of

previous analysis indicated that Croatian universities are not sufficiently active in incorporating social entrepreneurship into their curricula (Perić & Delić, 2014), however recent analysis state (Toplek, 2019), that faculties are increasingly recognizing the importance of social entrepreneurship and the benefits that come with introducing such subjects into teaching content.[14]

In addition, several organizations have launched various projects related to the nonformal education and training of social entrepreneurs in the last couple of years (shown in Vidović (2019) and Bokun (2022)[15]. Recently, various associations or social organizations (partly connected to project funds by European social fund) carry out man non-formal education. They are orientated toward certain groups such as young people, vulnerable groups, or the general population[16]. Transfer of good practices through educational seminars and workshops organized by social enterprises and civil society organizations is therefore in the sector (Bokun, 2022.; Vidović, 2019). We may conclude that education for social entrepreneurship in Croatia is sporadic and takes place at only a few educational institutions and certain non-formal educational programs (Bokun, 2022.; Baturina and Babić, 2021). Evaluation of Strategy for the development of Social Entrepreneurship stated that there are dozens of secondary and higher education institutions that develop education and training programs but the cooperation between them is not significant (Vasseur et al., 2021).

Discussion

SEE is recognized as one of the key ingredients for developing the sector (European Commission, 2020) and social entrepreneurs need a specific set of skills (OECD. 2022.b) and sensitivity to their context. In recent years, entrepreneurship education has become more common in education

Organization and Informatics Varaždin, but also various economic faculties such as the one in Osijek, Zagreb, Pula, Split, VERN'

[14] The first university textbook in the Croatian language that covers topics of Social economy and social entrepreneurship (Baturina & Babić, 2021) could be potentially relevant for the further development of education on this level.

[15] At the beginning of the development of the sector, some international organizations like AED and NESsT were also an important source of education for aspiring social entrepreneurs (Vidović, 2019; Šimleša et al., 2015).

[16] Currently, there is also ongoing creation of the lifelong learning program of education for work integration social enterprise within Erasmus+ project B WISE (Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills in Work Integration Social Enterprises

systems, but social entrepreneurship and social economy business models, are still far from being a standard component in all entrepreneurship education curricula and business courses (European Commission. 2021).

Our analysis has shown that in most EU countries[17], SEE exists in higher education. The introduction of social entrepreneurship study courses in curriculum depend mainly on higher education institution strategy and academics initiative and motivation.

Many university programs aimed to meet the training needs in social entrepreneurship rely on the foundations and teaching strategies of general or traditional entrepreneurship (García-González, & Ramírez-Montoya, 2021). But on the other hand it is estimated that faculties have done a good job of utilizing powerful pedagogical methods like service learning (Brock & Steiner, 2009). So, SEE in higher education therefore has significant potential, which has not received enough attention until now (British Council, 2017).

Other forms of SEE (non-formal) are developed in the third sector and are more prominent than in formal education. But they are also less systemized and structured (Bokun, 2022) and quite diverse. That is aligned with Alourhzal & Hattabou (2021) findings that show that SEE programs contain different content and teaching methods, while there is a lack of uniformity on "what" and "how" taught social entrepreneurship.

In addition, the analysis have shown that SEE in path dependable and often follow the level of recognition and development of social entrepreneurship in each of specific European countries (European commission, 2020). Croatia SEE case demonstrate how development of SSE in depends on the context. Social entrepreneurship field slowly developing with lack of support and SEE but SEE programs develop in higher education prompted by enthusiasm of individuals that recognize its importance. On the other hand non-formal education and training for social entrepreneurship is fostered by European funded projects in the third sector

Another important question is why develop SEE. SEE can have various effects. First, it can transmit knowledge and foster skills development to start a social enterprise. Students who are exposed to SEE perceived social entrepreneurship as more desirable and feasible (Kedmenec et

[17] Social entrepreneurship in higher education has been studied worldwide for example in Iran (Salamzadeh at al., 2013) or India (Kumar, 2021).

al., 2016) and SEE increase the propensity of students to launch social enterprises through a process of experiential learning in which students co-create shared communities of practice (Hockerts, 2018).

Secondly, SEE is likely to increase social awareness, make people sensitive to problems in their environment, and help them create innovative solutions (Dobele, 2016). SEE can foster innovative solutions for the world burdened by wicked problems (Ranabahu, 2020). A study (Amundam, 2019) argues that, the extent to which SE education can develop social innovative thinking. The role of social entrepreneurship, which SEE can help develop, is also seen in helping vulnerable populations, innovating solutions for social problems and preserving people and the planet (WEF, 2020). Therefore, SEE is closely connected with addressing social problems and is a possible step towards achieving social progress in society.

Conclusion

SEE plays an important role in the development of individuals and the development of society. Through providing SEE in higher education institutions, it is possible to develop an individual's social awareness, creativity, and sensitivity to problems in society. Social entrepreneurship in higher education can establish catalytic social actions that drive social value creation, society change and sustainability (Păunescu & Cantaragiu, 2013). However, the introduction of social entrepreneurship study courses in the curriculum depends mainly on higher education institution strategy and initiative and motivation of academics. Therefore, there is a need for more advocacy and support mechanisms for the introduction of SEE (OECD, 2022.a; European Commission, 2021).

Development of SEE on the other levels of the education system could foster sustainable changes from an early age and encourage the pathways of different thinking about the nature of the economy and society. OECD (2022.a) recommends considering the inclusion of activities related to social entrepreneurship and social economy in formal and non-formal learning at all levels, from primary through to postsecondary and adult education

In the end, it is important to mention that social entrepreneurs are needed to develop a social entrepreneurship education program for the new century (Paunescu & Vidović 2020) so strong

transdisciplinary collaboration in this area is needed. United Nations (2020) recommend SEE and training by experiential learning approach, including all aspects of sustainable development in school curricula starting at the primary level.

This analysis presents preliminary insights regarding the main trends, levels and programs of social entrepreneurship education in vast variety of SEE in European countries. Although our analysis shows some SEE trends in Europe question of whether the field will continue to converge into a commonly accepted framework of educational principles, standards, and content for future SE managers and leaders (Mirabella & Young, 2012) is still open.

Due to limited research on this topic, this analysis can be a good starting point for further research development on the topic. It is definitely recommended to make a catalog of education for social entrepreneurship in EU countries, research the specifics of education (program content, groups engaged and pedagogical tools used), as well as the impact of education on development of new social enterprises social entrepreneurship field or addressing social problems. As part of research efforts, case studies of education development in individual countries can be developed.

The limitations of the research is that there is limited research on the topic in the EU context, so paper mostly focused on what the social entrepreneurship ecosystem mapping reports by individual countries say about education for social entrepreneurship, which certainly does not represent a complete insight into that education.

Nonetheless, few recommendations can be mentioned. In developing education for social entrepreneurship it seems necessary to involve different types of experiential learning (such as service learning) and foster collaboration of teachers and practitioners. For the effective policies and measures for the development of social entrepreneurship, development of further educational programs is recommended, which would provide knowledge about social entrepreneurship and especially develop entrepreneurial skills (Ndou, 2021). As a concluding note, we may support British Council (2017) thought, which emphasizes that for empowering the next generation to address society's needs we need to raise awareness of different stakeholders about potential impact of social entrepreneurship education and social entrepreneurship in education systems.

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Collaboration and support, or the lack of it: The case of a Bulgarian entrepreneurial project in a rural area

Petya Dimitrova

Independent researcher (Bulgaria)

Introduction

In the opening article of the volume "Anthropological Perspectives of Solidarity and Reciprocity," editor Peter Simonič underscores the emergence of various communitarian models of production, exchange, distribution, and consumption in response to the subsistential challenges following the 2008 global financial crisis. These models, often referred to as "alternative economic practices," encompass cooperatives, agrarian commons, immediate supply networks, social enterprises, and housing communities, among others (Simonič 2019: 11). In this article, I explore a case study that embodies both a small-scale social enterprise and a housing community. In early 2017, a 30-year-old woman, hereafter referred to as C. embarked on an innovative venture in the context of Bulgarian entrepreneurship. Inspired by the Serbian coworking and coliving space called *Mokrin House*[18] described in its website as "a modern and urban spot in a rural surrounding", and influenced by the Spanish "glocal network of people, initiatives and places" called *Pandora Hub*[19], C. formulated a business plan to bring a similar entrepreneurial project to her hometown of Botevgrad. This project ambitiously aspires to "attract young people closer to nature (…) to transform our first rural Bulgarian house into coworking and coliving space, where entrepreneurs, freelancers, digital nomads and startups can enjoy nature, secluded working environment, home-made food and to attend various events and workshops" (direct quote copied from the project's website). The house is named *Zellin house* and is situated in the

[18] https://www.mokrinhouse.com/about-us
[19] https://www.pandorahub.co

recently urbanized villa zone (vilna zona) named Zellin, just 70 km away from the capital city of Sofia, accessible via a one-hour drive on the highway.

It took C. over a year to crystalize her concept to herself and to potential contributors. She presented the idea in various forums for young entrepreneurs, and even on the TV show *"Da hvanesh gorata"*, eventually attracting the first volunteers who joined in some yard activities in early 2019.

In the spring of the same year, C. finally found the pivotal support of a local 33-year old guy named K. who was hired to demolish an old shed with his excavator. Four years away later, in 2023, while explaining to me how he ended up as the main person who's maintaining the coworking space, he says: "I liked the idea, I simply resonated with it. This woman described to me in words that greatness, which I feel inside me, that I strive for, but I can't explain it through my own vocabulary. In a couple of words: many interesting people will come, I will meet different personalities, each strong in a different field, and that's something cool".

The story of C. and K. offers an illustration of several facets of cooperation and support. In this article I draw upon my fieldwork conducted at *Zellin house* in February 2023, as part of a broader research project on mobility, counterurbanization, and entrepreneurial initiatives in rural areas[20]. I employ the term 'solidarity' to denote *the fundamental social relationships taking place in everyday life, based on mutuality, sharing, and reciprocity*. In this context, I address several questions. What do C. and K. contribute to one other as collaborators? More broadly, how do values of collaboration, sharing, mutuality, and networking manifest themselves among the entrepreneur, other local entrepreneurs and visitors? Last but not least, what forms of non-solidarity are evident? To provide answers, I draw on some semi-structured ethnographic interviews, fieldwork observations and my active participation in the communal life at *Zellin house*.

Zellin house as an example of lifestyle migration practices

[20] The article is published within the ongoing research project " The Neighbour from Sofia, the New Villager from Germany: Counterurbanisation, Sociocultural Interactions and Local Transformations" funded by the Bulgarian National Science Fund (Contract No: КП-06-Н70/10)

Before delving into the significance of solidarity and cooperation in the establishment and operation of *Zellin house* as well as its broader “network of projects, people and places”, we need to understand the life story of the project’s owner, referred to as C. This narrative provides insights into why she conceived the idea of a coworking space and how her core values of cooperation and networking developed.

C.'s story is an example of a phenomenon known as “lifestyle migration” which is conditioned by the characteristics of contemporary life - lifestyle migration. Coined by sociologists Michaela Benson and Karen O'Reilly this term describes "relatively affluent individuals, moving either part-time or full-time, permanently or temporarily, to places which, for various reasons, signify for the migrants something loosely defined as quality of life" (Benson, O'Reilly 2009: 621).

Before she ended up living and working in the house of her ancestors, C. had traveled a long way starting from her local town of Botevgrad (and the village of Zellin in particular) marked by a constant mobility. In 2013, she embarked on a career as a stewardess with *Emirates* airline living in Dubai, but eventually left the job in late 2014 and returned to Bulgaria’s capital, Sofia. Here she sought the career she’s been expected to follow, having already attained a Law degree. She joined the Road Infrastructure Agency and in the meantime was considering to establish her own legal practice. She spent a year and seven months in this institution in order to familiarize herself with the professional legal milieu. However, a growing disenchantment with the corporate and urban lifestyle began to manifest within her.

“I was clear to myself that I don’t like to deal with law in the standard way”, C. reflects. “I didn't envision myself confined to a static environment, communicating with the same individuals along a singular trajectory. I yearned for the creativity and freedom that nature in Bulgaria offered, I knew this is why I left Dubai. I had reached a point where big cities, corporate atmospheres, office sterility, and the artificial dynamics of large organizations were overwhelming. I craved a life closer to nature, waking up to clean air and breathtaking views.”

This strong desire for personal freedom and creative expression resonated with the concept of coworking spaces. As defined by Gandini (2015: 194), these are “shared workplace utilised by different sorts of knowledge professionals, mostly freelancers, working in various degrees of specialisation in the vast domain of the knowledge industry (…) these are, more importantly,

places where independent professionals live their daily routines side-by-side with professional peers, largely working in the same sector".

C. recalls that the events she attended at different coworking spaces (like Mokrin House in Serbia) often revolved around topics close to her heart, such as culture, art, and business. "I realized this was a perfect fit for me. It involved organizing and constant interaction with diverse people, something I sorely missed in the legal field. I felt limited both professionally and personally, lacking cultural diversity and freedom of thought, lacking meaningful communication on both a professional and interpersonal level. My experience in Dubai reinforced my preference for engaging with a variety of people, helping them, connecting with them, learning from them, trying different foods even. These are the activities that make me feel empowered."

Incorporating a coliving component into her idea to establish a coworking space in nature, C. aimed to host like-minded individuals with aspirations and mindset similar to hers. According to Musilek (2020: 12, 15), a coliving space is "a form of cohabitation in a built structure which seeks to formulate a particular vision of life and puts in place arrangements (social, spatial, temporal, discursive) to create and sustain it. (…) creating and enhancing opportunities for effortless socialisation, providing options for easily accessible leisure activities, and helping with tiring and mundane aspects of life (such as cleaning or shopping for household essentials) which could stand in the way of professional success and enjoyment of leisure." C. spent three years converting her family's old house into a welcoming space with nine beds in three shared rooms. Additionally, she renovated the existing old garage into a cosy event hall with a studio designed for two individuals.

To emphasize that *Zellin House* is not a mere guesthouse but a coliving space, C. encourages guests to stay for at least five days, with reduced pricing for longer durations. A room for three or four people costs 168 leva per day, but only 960 leva for a week and 1560 leva for a month. This means that if three people reside there for an entire month, they pay just 520 leva, equivalent to the average rent for a two-room apartment in Sofia.

Mixing freelance work as an entrepreneur in a rural area, and a jurist, C. embarked on a journey of self-realization, akin to the visitors of the coworking and coliving space she was expecting. Most commonly known as 'digital nomads' (Al-Zobaidi, 2009; Dal Fiore et al., 2014; Richards,

2015)., these are individualistic online workers that tend to be on the move and experiment with rootlessness, reflexivity, and strangeness (D'Andrea, 2013). They are also referred as neo-nomads (Naz, 2016), or lifestyle migrants (Rana, 2018). As Orel argues, "Due to digital nomads' active involvement in local society, whilst performing work, they should not be mistakenly linked with leisure-seeking tourists".

In sum, while pursuing an existence more consonant with her aspirations, C. undertook a geographical shift, one that brought her closer to nature and rural life while maintaining the advantages of civic life. She made an assemblage of those two environments. The new lifestyle she strived to step into is in stark contrast to what she believed constrains her horizons and limits her interactions.

Zellin house and the practice of solidarity

Lifestyle migrants, such as my research participant C., often employ innovative strategies and practices to align their surroundings with their interests, hobbies, and mindset. She designed the place and chose its target group in such a way, so that everything fits into her values – freedom and independence; support and mutuality; striving for development of both the self and the community. *Zellin house* is a mix between a business project and a project aimed at the self-growth of its owner, visitors and contributors. Most of them can be characterized as 'culturepreneurs': urban protagonists who possess the ability to mediate between and interpret the areas of culture and of service provision (Lange, 2006). Put in other words, the prevailing part of these are "knowledge professionals with multi-functional skills and irregular career paths, operating as self-entrepreneurs within scarcely-institutionalised economies" (Gandini 2015: 196).

In the same article Gandini remarks that the coworking phenomenon has been "connoted with the expectation of being the 'new model of work' in the context of the 'collaborative and 'sharing' economy". However, in my research I approach coworking not as "the" new model of work, but rather as "one of" the new potential models of work. As Gandini (ibid) warns, we shouldn't consider coworking phenomena as inevitably positive, as the 'vibe' seems to support, and we should stay alerted to an emerging 'coworking bubble', given that coworking is being increasingly

used for branding, marketing and business purposes. But these do not seem to constitute the primary objectives for which C. has utilized her coworking space.

Numerous articles in popular media over the last two decades depict coworking not merely as a product of entrepreneurship but as a philosophy and movement with values centered on *collaboration*, *community*, and *networking* (see for example Reed 2007). These three concepts address the needs of contemporary microbusinesses and freelancers who are the typical visitors coexisting and collaborating on a variety of actions/tasks/events in a coworking space (Capdevila 2014). Gandini (2015: 196) notes that "a significant element that seems to characterise coworking practices is an open source community approach to work, intended as a collaborative practice that seeks to establish communitarian social relations among the member-workers". It's not only the workers who practice solidarity and reciprocity, but the proprietors of the space too. Spinuzzi (2012) considers them as "hybrid figures" that simultaneously lead the space and cowork within it. They and their visitors both cultivate social relations to increase profit, business outcomes are achieved by the means of temporary or continuing partnerships.

This is exactly what I've observed in *Zellin house*. After my initial fieldwork in February, during the whole 2023, a couple of digital nomads reached out to C. and stayed at her space, but their numbers remained relatively limited, and they did not constitute the central focus of her efforts. Her primary emphasis was directed towards the establishment of "a network of places, people and projects".

In the previous years, she had already initiated several joint initiatives with like-minded individuals. Her first successful collaboration happened in July 2019 when, despite the house's unfinished state, it hosted 20 people from across Bulgaria came to *Zellin House* to take part in *Zero start* – the first Bulgarian entrepreneurial program in a rural area. For five days they've been working with five mentors from various sectors, including finance, and marketing. Participants developed their ideas for projects or businesses focused on social change and the mentors helped them to clearly formulate these ideas as business projects. C. involved in the event a couple of products and services such as: a friend of hers who prepared gourme food and catering for the guests during the five days; a local artist who hosted a painting workshop in the coworking space;

a local guy who arranges hot air balloon excursions and bungee jumping in a village near Botevgrad. These individuals have taken part in other events in the following years too.

Another notable initiative that enrolled local people in a collective action was the cleaning of a local hut which is not operating for visitors. In 2020 C. and her main local collaborator K. teamed up with a local guy who's a world champion in taekwondo and the children he was coaching. Alongside many other volunteers, they cleaned up the accumulated waste some of which has been there since almost five decades. The deputy mayor invited a national television to cover the cleaning initiative. Apart from this the municipality didn't help a lot, it just sent a small truck which weren't enough for the amount of waste. All of the transportation and materials were provided by K. As a follow-up of the event C. developed a business plan for the hut to be opened for visitors again but stumbled upon the resistance of some powerful local people.

When I ask C. about her main problems regarding her entrepreneurship in a rural area, she says that she prefer the word "challenges" and explains: *""What I do is not simply about making money from this place as a business. The bigger motivation and intention that has guided me from the beginning is to create new models, to develop the entire area together as a community. That's why I don't see how it could happen without communicating with the locals. So, the challenge is establishing contact and social reintegration. (…) Despite all of my contacts (…) I haven't found anyone eager to take serious initiative. I often encounter skepticism and resistance to new things and new topics, despite them seeing how things can happen. Nevertheless, there is no motivation for them to keep working. They seem to focus more on how things can't happen and how nothing depends on them, whether it's due to a lack of money, a lack of skills, the belief that someone will hinder them, or because there's no one to appreciate the efforts"*.

Nevertheless, C. has cultivated connections with individuals who share her values and ideas and are engaged in various projects in the Botevgrad region. Notably, she has established contact with the son of the owner of one of the largest organic farms for apples, pears, and cherries on the Balkan peninsula. This farm presents a potential venue for hosting collaborative events, bridging diverse business domains. In recent years, C. has also forged a connection with a like-minded family of entrepreneurs in the nearby towns of Lukovit and Karlukovo, 60 km away from Botevgrad. A. and P. are dedicated to developing tourism in the region by meticulously building

and restoring houses using clay, stone and wood. However, the couple are primarily driven by a personal pursuit of gratification rather than specific business objectives and the intended collaboration between C. and them has been failed by now. In 2023, C. has tried to co-host a group event with another guest house in Zellin. While the initial plan involving 18 guests eventually fell through, as they decided not to come, C. and the house owners committed to future collaborative efforts.

The most consistent local person who is the only one contributing regularly, even daily, to the coworking space and to C.'s initiatives is K. – the 33-year old neighbor who owns a small business related to heavy machinery and in the meantime helps her with almost everything. Since his involvement in demolishing an old shed in the yard in 2019, K. has evolved into "the key person assisting me with the maintenance of the space and its overall development, the main person I've relied on for building the space itself" (quote by C.).

When I discuss with K. his role for *Zellin house*, he proudly recalls: "In this place, I've basically touched every paving stone, tile, or rock along the fence, and every plank has passed through my hands. I help when I could with money, when I could with work, with connecting to local people too. When I met Tsvetina, the names of some locals whom I'd like to connect her to just popped up in my mind."

The reciprocal support between K. and C. transcends the boundaries of their professional relationship and extends into the realm of friendship, marked by the sharing of personal matters and the pursuit of emotional assistance. They've become friends who share a lot with each other and seek emotional help C., whose recent hobby has evolved into a burgeoning specialization in psychology, now serves as a quasi-psychotherapist, owing to her growing expertise in the field. K. acknowledges the importance of this support as he's had a difficult relationship with his family resulting in severe alcoholism and residing in a sober living home for a couple of months. When I ask him to comment on the emotional support of C. and on her firm and often critical attitude towards him, he explains: *"For me, the ego is something huge. C. always knows when I'm not authentic while we communicate –I notice these things in myself, but admitting them is much harder. However, knowing that there's someone who can point it out and remind me makes it much easier. And this communication builds me up. I'm like bla-bla-bla-bla and she's like tak-tak-*

tak-tak". K. confirms C.'s opinion that he has problems to express himself and his feelings, and often outlines how much she did for him and for everyone in the establishing network of people and projects. C. contends that while people contribute to the success of her coworking and coliving space, she reciprocates by nurturing their personal and professional development.

Conclusion

While working on this article in September and October 2023, I had the opportunity to reengage with C. once more. She called me and proudly informed me that she enrolled in the *Developmental Psychology* MA program at one of Bulgaria's most prominent universities. Concurrently, she is also attending a course on hypnosis offered by a private organization. As part of her educational journey, she now resides in Sofia for at least three working days each week, all the while maintaining her connection with Zellin through regular travels.

A quote by Rana (2018: 255) that resonated with C.'s evolving lifestyle immediately flashed in my head: "In today's world, we find mobilism as a lifestyle choice." The conversation with C. reaffirmed my premise underlying this case study, which revolves around the dynamics of solidarity and cooperation in the context of contemporary rural entrepreneurship and lifestyle migration.

C. established *Zellin house* coworking space not merely as a conventional business venture but as a deeply personal and communal endeavor. It serves as a magnet for individuals who share her interests, offering a platform for mutual growth and development among its diverse users. Her overarching objective transcends the conventional notion of managing a successful and economically viable coworking space. Instead, she seeks to achieve the following key goals: a) personal development through continuous engagement with a dynamic and culturally diverse community, and b) regional development by introducing innovation, enhancements, and fresh business and cultural opportunities to Botevgrad. Her overarching vision is to create a cohesive "network of people, places, and projects" that collectively enrich the region of her hometown. As Pileva et al (2023: 110) conclude: "developing a business for years affirms and strengthens the connection with the given place not only on a day-to-day basis, but also on an economic and social level."

Notably, while C. has successfully fostered a sense of solidarity and collaboration by initiating a variety of joint projects with like-minded individuals, her innovative methods and ideas seem to face resistance or inapplicability among the majority of local small-scale entrepreneurs and even local authorities. As of now, she has garnered only the support of individuals who share her values and resonate with her methods and ideas.

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“As if you were in your parents’ home”: social support for small business owners in a community association

Anja Iveković Martinis

Independent researcher (Zagreb, Croatia)

Introduction

Against the backdrop of deindustrialisation and the rise of the service economy, small artisanal businesses have been “promoted as a liberatory alternative to large-scale enterprise and mass production” in the wake of the 2007 global financial crisis (Munro and O’Kane, 2021, p. 1). Also, due to their small scale and mostly local reach, they fit in well with the growing drive to purchase locally produced goods, both for environmental reasons and in order to stimulate local economies, as a counterweight to the dominance of larger national or multinational corporations. However, it can be very difficult to establish and maintain these kinds of businesses on a level where they are profitable and this sector is thus characterised by significant precarity and uncertainty (*ibid*.). In spite of this, at a meeting that I attended in Vestigium (the association that is the focus of this paper), many of the 20 or so people present said that they would like to quit their jobs or had already done so, in order to start their own small business project or to focus fully on a project that was already underway.

The role of Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) practices in this context can be to foster collaboration and different forms of mutual support, both among the artisans/producers themselves and between them and their customers and other community members, in order to provide more security and help with overcoming obstacles that often result in the closing of small businesses or discourage their opening in the first place. Rather than individualism and competition, the SSE encourages collaboration, reciprocity, building social ties and the formation of communities (Dash, 2014). It has long been recognised in studies of entrepreneurship and self-

employment that, although often initiated and led by one person, such ventures need to be viewed as shaped by and reliant on that person's relationships with a number of other people (e.g. Johanisson, 1998). Social support provided by people in a person's network has been pointed out as a crucial resource in this regard (Wright et al., 2021). Even in the context of increasing trends towards precarity and individualisation, or precisely because of them, new practices of building supportive networks and communities have been developing (e.g. coworking, start-up incubators). Some of them have faced critique, however, claiming that, while enabling mutual support, they can also encourage (self-)exploitation and the development of power imbalances (*ibid*.).

This paper will present a somewhat different case - that of a non-profit association in Zagreb which acts as a neighbourhood community centre, while also providing informal support to people looking to start small (primarily artisanal) businesses. Since this is quite a specific combination in the Croatian context, I was interested in understanding the role played by the association and the community that it fosters in providing different forms of social support to small business projects that are in accord with the principles of the SSE. The paper is a result of interviews and ethnographic fieldwork conducted over several months in 2021 and 2022, as part of the SOLIDARan project, mainly with people who have started or further grown their small business projects through their engagement with the association. The first part of the analysis focuses more on relationships between producers, artisans or service providers on the one hand and their customers on the other, while the second part foregrounds mutual support among the former. Before that, I will briefly describe the motivation behind founding Vestigium and how the association functions now and then present a theoretical framework for interpreting its activity in terms of support for small businesses.

From the personal to the societal: the motivation behind Vestigium

Vestigium is a community association located in the Vrbani neighbourhood in Zagreb and it was founded in 2011 by Irena[21], who was a resident of the neighbourhood at the time, along with some of her friends. Their motivation can be viewed on three levels. On the personal level, Irena

[21] Real first name used with permission of the research participant.

was looking for a type of work which would allow her to spend more time with her family and be more in tune with her beliefs, worldview and interests, while providing opportunities for creativity and self-expression. On the community level, Irena and her friends noticed both a lack of and an interest in something like a community centre for their neighbourhood. Irena also personally had a strong desire to be part of a more closely-knit community; as she told me, she wanted something resembling a small village, but since she did not have the possibility at the time to move to the countryside, she had to build this kind of community in the city. The link between the local community level and the broader societal level was provided by the ideas of the Transition movement, founded by Rob Hopkins in England in 2005, which advocates for engagement with broader social and environmental issues through local community building and sees "small" local acts as contributing to change on a broader level. Along with the basic ethical principles of permaculture (caring for people, caring for nature and just distribution of resources with limits to consumption and reproduction; cf. Holmgren, 2011 [2002]), these are the ideas that spurred Irena and her friends to start with their activities on the neighbourhood level, while keeping in mind the broader goals of change that they aspired to.

From the beginning, the range of activities that the association was going to organise and the different domains of life that these activities are linked to was not delimited in advance. Apart from the diverse interests of Vestigium's founders, another reason for this was the community-oriented ethos of the association, with an inclusive and participatory attitude. Vestigium's space is thus open to anyone who would like to organise an activity or event there, as long as it is in accord with the basic ethical principles and a small fee is paid to help cover rent and utilities. A further reason for this openness is the fact that the association prefers to be more or less financially self-sustainable and not depend exclusively on project-based funding, since the latter is often accompanied by discouraging bureaucratic procedures and long waits for funds with strict limits to their use. Thus, Vestigium's activity and the network of people and businesses that has developed around it through the years make up a platform that allows all of those participating to benefit from it - among other things, in an economic sense: customers find products (locally grown food, cosmetics from natural ingredients etc.), services (massage, aromatherapy) or leisure and educational activities (yoga, dance, various arts and crafts courses

etc.) that are perhaps not available or are of a lower quality elsewhere; artisans and agricultural producers sell their wares and find new customers; and the fees paid for using the association's space and resources help cover its costs (also, those who use the space are expected to help maintain it and keep it clean).

Today Vestigium has approximately 130 more or less active members, while another 90 or so people are occasionally or regularly involved through selling their products or produce (e.g. at the weekly farmers' market, which is the association's best-known regular activity) and/or holding workshops, courses, presentations and other activities open to the public. In 2021, a co-operative was founded in order to further strengthen, develop and promote the network of artisans and agricultural producers that has been built up around the association, as well as another community centre in Brezovica near Zagreb, where Irena and her family now live.

A framework for interpreting Vestigium's activity: social support for entrepreneurs and coworking

Social support has long been recognised as an important factor in entrepreneurship; it affects the likelihood that a person will enter the entrepreneurial process and perform successfully in it (Søgaard Nielsen, 2019, in reference to Stam *et al*., 2014). Social support can be defined as "the resources that people obtain from their social relationships and use when they face difficulties" (Søgaard Nielsen, 2019, p. 1, in reference to Kim *et al*., 2013) or more specifically as the perceived "number and quality of friendships or caring relationships that provide either emotional reassurance, needed information, or instrumental aid in dealing with stressful situations" (Fisher, 1985, p. 40, in Zhu *et al*., 2017). Support can thus be in the form of providing e.g. information or advice relevant to the business project, instrumental support (helping with specific tasks) or emotional support. Emotional support in general can be defined as "individuals' encouragement of others and expression of love and liking" (Søgaard Nielsen, 2019, p. 2, in reference to Pierce *et al*., 1996) and it can "increase entrepreneurs' confidence in completing business tasks, thereby motivating them to devote more efforts to their venture" (Zhu *et al*., 2017). Social support can be provided by various sources, for example the entrepreneur's family, friends, coworkers or supervisors at work (*ibid*.). Family support in particular has been shown to reduce the

entrepreneur's intention of giving up a business venture that is already underway, among other things by affecting how they perceive circumstances related to their work: the more support they receive, the more likely they are to perceive difficult circumstances as a challenge ("that can be eventually overcome and produce feelings of fulfilment and personal growth"), rather than a hindrance (something "that stand[s] in the way of achieving one's goals") (*ibid*.).

While the concept of social support is focused on the individual (entrepreneur) and how their relationships with people around them contribute to the success of their business project and their own well-being, in order to understand the way Vestigium works we also need a conceptual framework that can acknowledge multiple, mutually supportive relationships among a broader, variously interconnected group of people. Although Vestigium is not a coworking space, it shares some important similarities with the practice of coworking. Coworking is described as "a constructive and highly social activity that promotes free exchanges of ideas underpinned by commonly held values of collaboration, openness, community, accessibility and sustainability" (Butcher, 2018, p. 4, in reference to Merkel, 2015). Apart from helping coworkers master "the financial, organisational and social aspects of independent work" (*ibid*., p. 5), coworking allows them to benefit from "interaction, feedback, trust, learning, partnerships, encouragement and referrals" (Butcher, 2018, p. 5, in reference to Spinuzzi, 2012) within the community formed in a particular coworking space. According to Butcher (2018, p. 11), coworking "invites an intentionality to connect", through "routines and rituals", including communal activities. Spontaneity and informality are welcomed in approaching others, communicating with them and establishing relationships. This allows for the development of connections (and thus also for building entrepreneurial social capital) for people who would otherwise be working individually and would not have "such a range of opportunities for social exchange and collaboration with individuals from diverse occupational backgrounds" (*ibid*., p. 10). Relationships built in this way, as well as the whole coworking environment, are conducive to continuously learning from each other's different areas of knowledge, experience and skills and supporting each other's business projects in various ways.

Although coworkers can and do personally benefit from these relationships and thus also to an extent "tactically position themselves" (*ibid*., p. 15) with a personal business interest in mind, this

is not considered problematic and is accepted as an aspect of coworking practices, among other things because "it can construct an internal economy of exchange that sustains the community" (*ibid*., p. 16). Apart from the abovementioned mutual support among coworkers, individualist tendencies are balanced out by the fact that coworkers are expected to also give back to the community in various ways (for example by helping maintain the space). Through coworking, they "learn how to develop more collective, less individualistic entrepreneurial everyday practices" (*ibid*, p. 17), which helps them cope with their precarious working conditions, by "gaining support and developing agency" through "co-constructing a sense of community" (*ibid*., p. 15). An important result of this is that "career trajectories are being reimagined, re-enacted and reproduced as collective endeavours" (*ibid*., p. 17).

Wright, March and Wibberley (2021), on the other hand, are among those authors who have been more critical of coworking practices. They find that offering emotional support to other coworkers is an important aspect of the process of becoming part of the community and that it helps those receiving it deal with emotional issues related to their projects. This is in accord with the "values of altruism and mutual support" which are espoused by coworkers and seen as a "collective strength" (*ibid*., p. 12). Apart from emotional support, coworkers are also expected to offer their professional services for free or for a lower price to other coworkers as part of the community ethos. Rather than seeing them as mutually supportive, the authors consider these practices (potentially) exploitative, since there is no guarantee of gaining something in return. The empirical research that they present does not, however, provide any indications of power relations in this regard, i.e. of certain coworkers benefiting more and giving less than others. Rather than direct exchange, relations in coworking communities might instead be based more on a form of long-term generalised reciprocity, i.e. "when individuals repay favors to someone other than those they initially received favors from", which "is shown to enhance social solidarity more than direct exchanges in terms of bonding between individuals and the groups they are a part of" (Søgaard-Nielsen, 2019, p. 3, in reference to Molm *et al*., 2007). Therefore, a lack of directly reciprocal, clear and relatively "short-term" instances of "returning" or "repaying" favours does not necessarily need to be interpreted as exploitative or as an imbalance in power relations.

Producers and customers: a heterogenous community based on social and economic connections

In comparison to coworking spaces, start-up incubators or, for example, professional associations, the community that Vestigium has built is more inclusive and heterogeneous. The fact that the association is conceived primarily as a social or community centre, without a strict formal structure or criteria determining who can participate and in what way, encourages and provides ample opportunity for the development of connections between people in different positions: both agricultural producers, artisans and people offering services or activities, as well as customers or attendees of those activities, or their friends, neighbours and family members who might stop by.

These opportunities for informal socialising are particularly present during the regular weekly farmers' market held every Saturday throughout the year, which I attended for several months and which constitutes the main part of the fieldwork. Tables for the wares are set out in front of the association's premises, located in a quiet but accessible corner at the rear side of an apartment building, with a shaded green area (a lawn with trees) adjacent to it. Seating is set up in this green space and in the warmer part of the year it is used for children's workshops and other activities taking place during and after the market. Thus, on Saturdays both the indoor and outdoor space is busy with people who might be there for different reasons, but, due to the physical proximity of everything going on in the relatively small space, it is hard to avoid being exposed to other aspects of the association's activity that they were perhaps previously not aware of. With people chatting and children running around, it certainly has the feel of a neighbourhood gathering place. An example of how different social connections can easily develop in this context was given by one of my research participants, a woman who lives in the neighbourhood and who started her small artisanal business through the association:

Participant: „This whole group of us women who went to the yoga class [in Vestigium] had this phenomenal energy, we connected very quickly, we've stayed friends to this day, this kind of smaller group of people. We organised dinners here [in Vestigium], cooking workshops –"

Anja: „That same group from the yoga class?"

Participant: „That, and the circle was spreading, so we were very open, Irena supported that togetherness, collaboration, and all that; although we were a small group, we were actually a whole part of Vestigium, we very quickly met everyone here: the people who were selling [their products at Vestigium's market], who were coming here, organising anything, we actually networked with everyone." (W, small business owner and Vestigium member)

Attending yoga classes in Vestigium and connecting with others in that context was what prompted this participant to start her own business: she began making things that she needed for her own yoga practice (such as pillows to use while meditating) and gradually other practitioners also showed an interest in them, which grew to the extent that eventually she was able to quit her previous job and move to full-time self-employment with her artisanal business. She emphasised that she did not even have to put an effort into promoting her products, since it was actually the great demand for them that encouraged her to devote more effort to the production in the first place. Thus, by attracting and building networks of people interested in the kind of activities that the association offers and the lifestyles and values associated with them, Vestigium provides a readily available pool of potential customers for artisans and others, helping them in the early stages of their business.

The key to developing a customer base, as Irena explained to me, is to establish a connection on a personal level, primarily through direct, in-person interaction. Just as coworkers "tactically position themselves" (Butcher, 2018, p. 15) in order to (eventually) benefit economically from relationships, this is also encouraged in Vestigium, but without implying, however, that the relationship can or should be reduced to this utilitarian aspect – rather the opposite.

„Actually the best way to get to people is to go to the activities and workshops, so you meet people, and one recommends you to the other... There's no, you know... I can't post - I mean, I can post 'Lidija does Raindrop', but I doubt that someone will latch onto just that one post and say: 'I'm going to Lidija, Vestigium recommended it'. But if she goes to a workshop and spends two hours here with ten women, they'll all say something about themselves and some people will 'click' [get along well or find that they have something in common]. She'll just say: 'Well, I'd like to try that.'" (Irena, Vestigium founder and co-ordinator)

She gave the example of a Vestigium member who makes cosmetic products from natural ingredients and who was initially disinclined to share her recipes and methods for fear of people copying them. But Irena managed to convince her to hold workshops, and this, as she had predicted, finally led to a growing interest in the products, which was not the case when she was only selling them at the association's market. A similar approach applies to both artisans and agricultural producers: spending some time with them and getting to know them, as well as seeing for oneself their production process or trying it hands-on (by attending a workshop) makes people much more likely to prefer buying those products from those producers on the basis of these personal connections and experiences, as Irena told me. In this way, Vestigium, like coworking spaces, encourages those involved with it to develop an "intentionality to connect" (Butcher, 2018, p. 11) with others on both a social and an economic level. In terms of this emphasis on stronger connections between producers and consumers, based on, among other things, the development of trust, loyalty and solidarity, Vestigium's approach is similar to that of the networks of Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA), through which a group of consumers supports a number of small, usually environmentally friendly agricultural producers in an organised way by regularly buying their products or even assisting financially or otherwise when needed (*cf*. Orlić, 2019).

The social aspect of economic exchanges can also be encouraged by the more personal relationship that some Vestigium members have with their work, since it often originates in a need or desire of their own (e.g. for a specific type of food for medical or other reasons) which is linked to their lifestyle, values, preferences or interests. In this sense, Vestigium itself is similar to the small businesses that it supports. Both Irena and the participant who makes yoga accessories pointed out how important this personal aspect is in what they do (in Irena's case, referring to co-ordinating Vestigium's activity), for example when promoting their activity through online posts, which they always write themselves in order to give them a personal tone. Seeing one's work as a form of personal expression might be viewed as leaving one potentially more exposed and vulnerable (*cf*. Culpepper and Gauntlett, 2020, p. 156), but on the other hand it might also facilitate the establishment of connections with others based on shared values or

tastes, perhaps going beyond a fleeting transactional encounter between provider and customer, thus contributing to the community aspect of Vestigium's activity.

An example of how this form of connection, initially established through interaction at a workshop, can endure even without regular contact and provide significant emotional support to self-employed people during difficult times, is provided by another research participant:

„And then when Covid came, when there was no yeast in Croatia and all... The messages started: 'Aw, hi [name of participant and her partner], thank you for the sourdough, you taught us to make bread, thank you for that, we taught our moms, dads, grandmas, the knowledge spread...' And, like, in all that madness, you get a nice thank-you like that, your heart's as big as a house, like: 'Aaaw, there's some use from those workshops after all, those people did keep doing it...!' And then you remember: 'But that was two years ago! They've been feeding the yeast for two years! Wow, like...!' People do use it, we taught people something good." (W, small business owner and Vestigium member)

What starts as a simple provider-customer relationship can also acquire additional layers with time, in some cases with people switching roles according to their current needs, as one of the research participants, a member of a family agricultural business that sells its products at Vestigium's market, showed in this comment:

"Our customers, for example, one of our customers is our dentist [laughs], then another one fixes our car [laughs] and so, we've developed networks of different acquaintances and so, all kinds of things got rolling from Vestigium and friendships and so, business acquaintances..." [laughs] (W, Vestigium volunteer and member of family agricultural business)

Such ties, that allow those participating in them to benefit in more than one way, are a good example of the "internal economy of exchange that sustains the community" (Butcher, 2018, p. 16). They also introduce into contemporary urban life the multiple interconnectedness of traditional small rural communities, which Irena wanted to recreate, based in this case on voluntary relationships rather than arising from necessity or a lack of options.

Mutual support among association members

The importance of mutual support and solidarity among the association members themselves came across both in my conversations with them and in interactions that I observed between them. In order to facilitate this and discourage competitive attitudes, specifically among those who sell their products at Vestigium's market, a selection is carefully made so that there is a minimal amount of overlap in their offer of products (the market is small, with about 9 to 12 producers selling their wares at any one time during the period when I was there; some were regulars and others present depending on the season). Newcomers whose produce overlaps significantly with that of older members are welcome to participate a few times to give them the opportunity to reach new potential customers, but they cannot become regulars. Although this means that certain limits are set to the general openness and inclusiveness of the association's practices, this is a way of creating a space for economic activity that is protected from free market principles which are not conducive to solidary relationships. In this respect also, Vestigium is akin to coworking communities, which are carefully "curated" in a similar way by their hosts in order to encourage productive relationships of mutual support and learning (Butcher, 2018). A research participant described this supportive attitude among members by comparing Vestigium's market to larger farmers' markets:

Anja: „So in other places that feeling isn't there, among other people or other groups...?"

Participant: „Well, it's hard to achieve. Well yes, I think that that togetherness and that openness, you just have to find yourself in that kind of circle of people and that it isn't there in other places because there's this competitiveness. When you look, for example, I don't know, let's say, I'll compare [Vestigium's] market and the market on the real market, let's say. There is a bit of that competitive spirit there and with us it's all different somehow, because I think we all really *want* everyone else to make it and just that feeling of togetherness is something that separates us from the others. Somehow we all want to improve our own and also help the other in some way. There isn't as much competitiveness." (W, Vestigium volunteer and member of family agricultural business)

This readiness to help each other can take the form of different types of social support, including to newcomers. Market "regulars" with more experience would generally show interest in those who have recently started or are in the process of starting their own business; conversations in

which they provide them with advice and useful information could frequently be heard at the market. Where good quality and affordable packaging can be found or which other small markets are good places to find customers are examples of the kind of information shared. Advice is also regularly provided by Irena, particularly to those starting artisanal businesses or looking to organise workshops or courses, since she has by now accumulated a lot of experience in this regard and knows well the preferences of Vestigium's "clientele". She assists with promotion as well, announcing in advance new activities or products at the market on the association's Facebook page and taking and posting photographs of the products when the stall is set up. (Due to the importance of photographs in the online promotion of small artisanal businesses, Vestigium's activities include a photography course specifically aimed at business owners.) Other instrumental support is also provided among the association members; for example, when one of them had to deliver an order to another town, a member who lives in that town was happy to do it for him. It almost goes without saying that members selling their produce at the market also regularly buy from each other, at discounted prices and commonly gifting each other or bartering in a friendly and informal fashion. This recalls the description by Wright *et al*. (2021) of coworkers trading discounted or free-of-charge professional services, but while the authors view this critically as potential (self)exploitation, similar practices in Vestigium did not seem to have any negative aspects; rather, they contribute to the establishment and maintenance of mutually beneficial social and economic relationships.

These different forms of social support are not based on the principle of short-term balanced reciprocity, as market transactions are, but rather on that of long-term generalised reciprocity, which is also characteristic of kinship relations, as research in economic anthropology has shown (*cf*. Stewart, 2003). It is thus not surprising that some research participants use family-related metaphors when speaking of Vestigium, as we will see in the following quotes. Such supportive relationships, that can be relied on in the long-term, provide a stable base which makes it easier to deal with a certain amount of risk, for example with regard to other relationships which might not be as reliable (*ibid*.). Another way that Vestigium helps people starting businesses deal with risk and uncertainty is through its infrastructure: a relatively large pool of potential customers and different opportunities to interact with them, as well as the possibility of holding workshops

and selling the products made there through the association (without the business having necessarily been officially founded yet). This allows prospective (artisanal) business owners to test the potential market for their products or services while minimising the risk and stress that accompany the early stages of a business venture, as a participant explained:

Participant: „It was somehow a safe zone, a safe environment, as if you were in your parents' home, to start, to play, to try out –"

Anja: „Meaning Vestigium?"

Participant: Meaning Vestigium. Vestigium was that, really a safe environment where you can try out some things and see which direction you'll actually go in, which I needed very much at that time, actually, I would say that it was maybe one of the most important things, that I was supported in what I was doing and that I don't actually, kind of - like you have a parachute the whole time and when you fall you're actually safe. And you can't fall because everything is here." (W, small business owner and Vestigium member)

The feeling of safety and the space that it provided for creativity and enjoyment in work without financial pressure were a strong and much needed encouragement for this participant in the crucial early stages of her business (although she did also stay at her previous job for another five years and only quit when her business had sufficiently grown). She likens this feeling to being in her parents' home, like a child who is unconditionally supported and cared for, which resonates with another participant's description of her own relationship with Irena:

„I often joke that for me Irena is like my second mom. What I've said to Irena, like, Irena knows, literally, *everything*. Like, some things I didn't dare tell my mom, I'd tell Irena." (W, Vestigium volunteer and member of family agricultural business)

The "infrastructural support" offered by Vestigium is thus closely connected to the emotional support provided by Irena and other members of the community formed around the association (including those in the role of, or in the process of becoming, loyal customers), which creates an environment characterised by a feeling of belonging and care for one another, of being among "one's own". Emotional support and a sense of belonging have been recognised as aspects of family support for entrepreneurs which significantly contribute to sustaining their business

projects (Søgaard Nielsen, 2019). Although Vestigium itself is not a family in the usual sense, it thus provides support similar to that commonly provided by business owners' family members.

Another term that was used in the context of Vestigium is "tribe", which, in this case, can be understood as implying not just mutual support, but also similar values, interests and lifestyles. For example, in the following exchange:

Anja: "What would you say you've learned through relationships with people in Vestigium or through some advice you maybe got about work, in the sense of starting your artisanal business?"

Participant: "Follow your passion and be as simple as possible, don't complicate too much and find people with whom - find your tribe. Find your tribe, people who support you, and roll your own film."

Irena: "Along with 'follow your passion' is '*share* your passion'. That's very important too."

Participant: "Yes. *Share* your passion."

Irena: "So, when you figure something out and find that spark of yours and that something that is you, that you're made for, then you have to share it with others too. So, like, for me that's kind of an upgrade." [laughs]

Here they again emphasise the importance of a supportive community in the early phases of starting a business, not least as a source of validation, which might be badly needed when considering a career change (or an additional career, if one is not looking to quit one's current job). As opposed to the concept of social support, which focuses more on individuals in an entrepreneur's network, the emphasis here is on a group of mutually interconnected people, rather than being primarily connected to the entrepreneur themself as the central node in the network. This allows for the development of a feeling of belonging and identification with the group, which can occur either in parallel with the process of establishing and growing one's business or it can provide the necessary encouragement and support to make the first step in that direction. In this way Vestigium helps (prospective) small business owners develop a relationship toward their project that is shaped by and intertwined with their relationships with others who are involved in different ways with the association, resulting in (as Butcher [2018, p. 17] put it with regard to coworking communities) "more collective, less individualistic entrepreneurial everyday practices that benefit community and society". Self-realisation or self-

fulfilment, which is often promoted as one of the main purposes of starting one's own small (particularly artisanal) business (*cf*. Munro and O'Kane, 2021), should thus not be seen as separate from the feeling of belonging to a supportive community or group who share similar values, experiences and goals.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to show how important belonging to a supportive community can be for new or prospective small business owners. In this regard, Vestigium is most similar to coworking spaces, which encourage the development of friendly relationships among their members and a community ethos of providing and receiving emotional and other forms of support (*cf*. Butcher, 2018; Wright *et al*., 2021). The important difference, however, stems from Vestigium's primary role as a community centre of sorts, which means that it hosts various types of activities, with different possible ways of engaging in them: by offering one's own products or conducting activities on one hand, or by buying products or participating in activities on the other hand, or by switching between the two roles.

Through its open and participatory attitude and encouragement of the development of friendly relationships, the association has through the years accumulated a large number of people who are involved with it and who, to a greater or lesser extent, share its values of respect for people and the environment. It is particularly relevant that these values are also adopted by the business owners themselves through their involvement with the association (e.g. not using plastic or single-use packaging). This heterogenous community provides opportunities for new or prospective small business owners to receive informational and instrumental, as well as emotional support, the latter reinforced by a feeling of belonging and identification with a supportive group, akin to relationships within a family. The fact that this group includes not just other business owners, but also (prospective) customers, provides another crucial form of support, giving small businesses a necessary initial "boost" in building up their customer base. In this regard, in encouraging not just economic, but also social relationships, and in the resulting trust, loyalty and solidarity between producers and customers, Vestigium is similar to Community-Supported Agriculture groups.

It is important to mention, however, that most of the small business owners involved with Vestigium also have another job which contributes significantly or dominantly to their household budget, i.e. few of them manage to live only off their small business. So, although the support that Vestigium provides has significantly helped some small businesses become the only or main sources of income for their owners (and will continue to do so more efficiently through the recently founded co-operative), in many cases this form of support is not sufficient in order to achieve this goal. Another question that merits further research is why there are not more associations in Croatia which, like Vestigium, combine an open, participatory community orientation with support to small local ethical and environmentally friendly businesses. Although Irena has been active in promoting Vestigium's way of working and occasionally holds workshops on founding and co-ordinating a non-profit association, none of those she met and who expressed great interest in this have yet managed to successfully get a similar project off the ground. Thus, the next step might be to study less successful attempts at organising in order to pinpoint the specific types of obstacles that they face in the contemporary Croatian context and how they might be overcome.

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Local Community-Led Initiatives Promoting Solidarity and Sustainability: The Community Centre Rojc in Pula

Mirna Jernej Pulić

Institute for Anthropological Research (Zagreb, Croatia)

Introduction

The last few decades have been marked by a large increase in the number of diverse bottom-up initiatives and civic organizations based on cooperative and solidarity principles that began to emerge primarily in response to the global financial crisis of 2008. By giving priority to the common good as well as social and environmental needs over profit and by fostering solidarity and sustainability, all such organizations, enterprises and initiatives can be set under the common denominator of the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE)[22]. SSE organizations basically encompass "various organizations or collective efforts that aim to achieve the collective purpose and common goals" (Silva Junior, forthcoming 2023: 1) like social justice, cooperation, solidarity, mutuality, social inclusion, equality, as well as economic and ecological sustainability. They encompass associations, cooperatives, foundations, NGO's, community-led initiatives, community banks, mutual organizations, social enterprises, productive groups, exchange clubs, ecovillages, commons and many other forms of associations and movements whose activity is „driven by values of solidarity, the primacy of people over capital, and democratic and participative governance (OECD, 2022: 14)". As stated by Orlić *et al.* (2022), such practices have a socially innovative character and are opposed and critical to the dominant capitalist economic system. Since SSE organizations primarily address the societal needs and environmental challenges and prioritize the ecological sustainability and benefits of the society over the financial profit and growth (cf. Šimleša *et al.*, 2015), they have to implement innovative approaches,

[22] Cf. Utting, 2023; Orlić, 2019; Simonič, 2019; Šimleša *et al*., 2015; Miller, 2010.

solutions and specific business models based on collective action, collaboration and democratic governance. According to Henfrey *et al.* (2019), the social and solidarity economy becomes a vehicle through which various community-led initiatives operate and are trying to influence the policy with the aim of implementation of the sustainable development goals. This has been confirmed by the research of Esteves *et al*., who demonstrated on four case studies "how particular forms of SSE arising within movements of community-led initiatives for sustainability and social justice facilitate the delivery of sustainable development goals" (Esteves *et al.*, 2021: 1424).

Although they are already well established in most European countries, similar initiatives in Croatia have started to be launched more intensively only in the last decade. One of the goals of the scientific project "Solidarity Economy in Croatia: Anthropological Perspective (SOLIDARan)"[23] was to investigate and map the already existing and new initiatives, organizations and practices of the solidarity economy in Croatia.

In this paper I reflect on the role, activities, problems, challenges and perspectives of the several local civil society organizations and community-led initiatives that act in accordance with the principles of the social and solidarity economy and are located within the Community Centre Rojc in Pula (Istria, Croatia). The program and activities of the researched bottom-up associations primarily reflect the needs and interests of the local community. Through activism and artivism[24], they promote and support the sustainable development of the local community and environment, the circular economy principles, the alternative forms of exchange and consumption (based on ecological awareness and solidarity), the cooperation and the social inclusion of marginalized groups. In this way, they significantly contribute to the construction of the solidarity economy practices in Pula (and Istria). Having in mind their characteristics and aims, the investigated associations are considered community-led initiatives, which are defined by Henfrey *et al.* (2019: 2) as "self-organized initiatives of people working together towards some defined set of environmental and/or social goals."

[23] The project is funded by the Croatian Science Foundation under grant IP-2019-04.
[24] Artistic activism.

During the fieldwork in Istria conducted for the project "SOLIDARan" over a period of three months in 2022, I employed qualitative ethnographic methodology, which included the semi-structured in-depth interviews with the associations' gatekeepers, representatives, main actors and members, as well as the participant observation and the fotodocumentation of the practices under research. The aims of the research were to examine the motivations of the interlocutors for the involvement and work in the researched associations and initiatives, to find out how they perceive solidarity, in which way they affect social, economic and ecological sustainability of the local community, and what problems are they facing in their work. The goal was also to investigate whether and in which way Rojc as a community centre can have a positive effect on social impact, sustainability and future development of the researched associations and community-led initiatives. Twelve interviews were analysed[25] for the purpose of this paper, and the interpretation of the data collected is based on qualitative analysis.

Historical Transformations of the Community Centre Rojc in Pula

The Community Centre Rojc is a unique place in Pula and Croatia for several reasons. The building in which it is situated is still the largest building in the city (16.739 m²) and its purpose has changed throughout history several times to finally become what it is today. The building in which the today's Community Centre Rojc is situated was built in 1870, during the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Originally, the building was intended for the maritime military school, the *Marinen Schule*[26]. It had the same role when Istria was annexed to the Kingdom of Italy in 1920. Within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the partisan machine school was located in the building, while from 1973 the building served exclusively as military quarters and was named after a WW II national hero, Karlo Rojc. In 1991, following the disintegration of Yugoslavia, when the Yugoslav army left the building it was populated by war refugees. In 1998, the first civil society organizations entered the building and a year after the City of Pula decided to formalize the situation and the first contracts on the use of the premises inside the building were signed.

[25] Some significant quotes from the interviews are presented in the paper. With the aim of protecting the personal data and ensuring the anonymity of the interlocutors, only their gender (F/M) and age are indicated in the parentheses.

[26] More detailed information and the historical overview of transformations and purposes of the today's Community Centre Rojc is available in Celakoski *et al.* (2021).

> *"That place* [Rojc] *was created in a way by accident. That kind of energy was, like, bottom-up, it was simply that creative something ... people started entering, they started doing things and then that energy. But then, over time, we structured ourselves a bit, so that we could develop these certain things. After all, so that the building does not fall into disrepair."* (F, 43)

The building's transformation followed the world's post-industrial trend of reusing the brownfield sites (abandoned former industrial and military facilities) and transforming them into the community and cultural centres. Today, the Community Centre Rojc encompasses about 110 civil society organizations of different areas of social activity and interest (sports, culture, art, ecology, health, social care, youth, national minorities, social inclusion of marginalized groups, etc.). Most of them form part of the network of associations founded in 2011, named *Savez udruga Rojca (SUR)* (Eng. Rojc Alliance). The Alliance represents their interests in front of the City government, encourages the cooperation and strives to improve the management of Rojc. Besides that, *SUR* promotes and acts on the principles of SSE, such as solidarity, cooperation, active care for the environment, sustainable development, social innovations, active citizenship, gender equality, respect for diversity, social justice and similar (Celakoski *et al.*, 2021). Such a great number of associations that coexist in the premises of Rojc building are the reason why the Community Centre Rojc is sometimes called the „city of civil society". Since it plays an important socio-cultural role in the city of Pula (more than thousand users visit Rojc daily), Mišković (2018: 172) considers Rojc "a mirror of the situation in the community". It was described in a similar way by my interlocutor, an active member and founder of several organizations in Rojc:

> *"Rojc is a specific place. I mean, this story, however slow or unimportant it may seem to some, when you get to know Rojc, the story is actually very important. There is no place in Croatia, in the region, that gathers such a large number of associations in one place. And this is exactly his strength. This can only happen in Rojc. Because Rojc has this enormous strength in the amount of people who enter it every day. (…) I think that all this could have happened in Rojc and that it is questionable how it would develop elsewhere."* (F, 57)

The Community Centre Rojc is also a meeting and a gathering place for people who attend social activities and various workshops, educations and programs which take place in the common spaces like the courtyard and the inner space named „Living room". The Centre has its own official website "for the citizens of Rojc and their guests" (https://rojcnet.pula.org/), the community newspaper *Veznik*, the community library Rojc Book (which operates on the principle of donations) and the community media, the *Radio Rojc*[27]. Besides being a unique example of such a huge and thematically diverse community centre in Croatia, Rojc is also internationally recognized – it forms part of the Trans Europa Halles, a network of grassroots European Cultural centres. The City of Pula is the owner of the Rojc building and it manages and co-finances its maintenance, while the associations are exempt from rent payments and only have to maintain their premises and pay for the electricity. The Community Centre Rojc is a successful example of the cooperation between the City government and the civil society organizations in the form of the innovative model of civil-public partnership with the City of Pula, the so-called participatory management model[28]. This new and innovative model of organization and management of public resources is defined as "joint and collaborative action and dialogue between the public and civil sectors for the purpose of better quality, more effective and efficient management and use of public resources compared to conventional and traditional approaches" (Mišković *et al.*, 2015: 62, cf. Račić, 2022). The Coordination of the Community Centre Rojc was founded in 2008 and it consists of an equal number of representatives from the City of Pula and the Community Centre Rojc: three Rojc associations' representatives and three City government representatives, a total of six members.

Local Community-Led Initiatives and Associations

The associations that operate on the principles of the positive influence on the local community and the society in general are mainly of a non-profit orientation. This fact differentiates them from, for example, cooperatives which position themselves in relation to the market, according

[27] Radio Rojc is a non-profit community radio, which started broadcasting in 2018 and, among other things, promotes the work of Rojc associations.

[28] The participatory management model has become extremely popular in the last two decades. It emphasizes the effective participation and active citizenship that form the basis of sustainable and equitable development (Mišković *et al.*, 2015; cf. Silva Junior, forthcoming 2023).

to Šimleša *et al.* (2015). The same authors point out that SSE, besides usual actors (cooperatives, enterprises and associations that offer services and products), also includes informal groups or initiatives for mutual assistance, solidarity networks of joint production and purchase, associations of the informal economy, local currency, common good management, sharing economy and the like. In order to successfully address primarily the local socio-economic and environmental issues, the SSE organizations and initiatives operate in civil society arenas and are community-led. They generate novel and innovative bottom-up solutions for sustainable development and prioritise the welfare of local communities over profit – therefore they form a part of what is considered to be the social economy (Račić, 2022).

In the premises of the Community Centre Rojc in Pula there are located few civil society organizations and local bottom-up initiatives that act on the principles of the sustainable development of the local community and the environment. The activities they carry out are mostly of a non-profit type (sharing economy, collaborative and sustainable consumption, etc.) and aimed at solving major social and environmental problems on a micro level, such as the environmental pollution, the unemployment, the exclusion of certain social groups from the labour market, and similar:

> *"In order for us to live better some other communities, some other people suffer and live in very bad conditions. And we think that this simply needs to change. And actually, that's why we also like to do all these things, to show these innovative projects ... where, for example, social entrepreneurship and circular economy can show that it can be done differently."* (F, 43)

They promote and develop different SSE practices, the circular and sharing economy principles, the exchange and consumption based on ecological awareness, the social inclusion of marginalized groups and various non-capitalist practices. Considering their characteristics, the associations that will be presented in the paper can be considered community-led initiatives (CLI) (Henfrey *et al.*, 2019), as was explained in the introductory part of the paper.

Zelena Istra (Eng. The Green Istria association) is a non-profit citizens' association which is committed to the protection of the environment, natural resources and social justice and for more than twenty-five years actively participates in building a democratic, solidary and

environmentally sustainable society[29]. The association also advocates for participatory forms of governance of public goods and services, as opposed to their privatization, and it encourages public participation in decision-making processes. It regularly organizes do-it-yourself workshops, educations (on zero-waste, recycling, natural cosmetics, vertical gardening, permaculture, gender equality, etc.) and implements national, and EU projects[30] aimed primarily at the environment protection and advocating the principles of the sharing economy. In addition to promoting the sustainable consumption by organizing swap and exchange fairs and no-money events (*TiDam-TiDaš* fair, wheels exchange fair - bicycles, scooters, inline skates, skates, etc.), the Green Istria encouraged the founding of the Urban Gardens Group in 2021, which resulted in the creation of the inclusive Community Garden at the Pula's quarter Gregovica. Besides being a place for socializing and, as stated by one member in the interview, offering the members a sense of community, one of its aims is also the education of kindergarten and school children and the organization of various thematic workshops on urban gardening. One of the Green Istria's most innovative and commendable initiative is the first repair café and workshop in Croatia that was founded bottom-up (by a civil-society organization). The *Re-Geppetto Workshop and Repair Café* is a well-equipped space within the Rojc building founded in 2021, and it is the first repair workshop in Istria, a sort of tool library. The Re-Geppetto offers the citizens the opportunity to repair their small household appliances, furniture, clothes and toys on a do-it-yourself basis, free of charge, by using the tools available in the workshop (that are usually not worth buying) and with the help and advice of an expert or the workshop manager. By acting on principles of the sharing economy, waste reduction and circular economy and by promoting sustainable consumption patterns through various thematic workshops for schoolchildren, women and other interested public, this repair café and workshop seeks to build a stronger and more resilient and solidarity community. It was launched within the project "*ROJC: Razvijamo-Omogućavamo-Jačamo-Cijenimo*" (Eng. "ROJC: Developing-Enabling-Strengthening-Appreciating"), with the financial support of the European Union, the European Social Fund and the Office for Cooperation with NGOs of the Government of the Republic of Croatia. One of the Re-Geppetto Workshop

[29] The Green Istria association: https://www.zelena-istra.hr/en/about-us/

[30] "Communities go circular", "Garden (ACT)ivism", "Not in my backyard", "Tools for learning – tools for sustainable development" and many other.

projects carried out by the Green Istria Association, the “Repair Café Re-Geppetto - circular community and art” action, received the award for the outstanding action in the Association/NGO category during 13th edition of the European Week for Waste Reduction (EWWR) in 2021.

Udruga Merlin (Eng. The Merlin Association) is a non-governmental and non-profit organization founded in 2001 which also forms part of the partnership project “ROJC: Developing-Enabling-Strengthening-Appreciating”. With the aim of promoting creativity and creating a society of equal opportunities, the association organizes community projects for inclusion of marginalized groups (persons with disabilities, unemployed women, Roma children etc.). The social inclusion is fostered through creative workshops on traditional and art crafts, recycling, community gardening and the organization of various cultural and historical manifestations. The later also represents an opportunity for self-financing by selling souvenirs created by the association’s members and enables the Merlin Association to go in the direction of the social entrepreneurship.

The last example of a SSE initiative within the Community Centre Rojc that was taken into account for this research is *Buvljak Veštit*. It is a second hand flea market or a swap event that was launched in February 2022 by a young student and is held monthly in the premises of Rojc. In addition to supporting the sharing economy and zero waste principles through the offer of second hand clothes, shoes and other stuff, it also fosters solidarity and social capital by offering a chance to socialize.

Problems, Challenges and Development Perspectives of the Local Community-led Initiatives

During the analysis of the interviews, some common problems and obstacles that the researched Rojc’s associations face in their work turned out to be significant. In this paper, I will present some excerpts from the interviews, which illustrate the problematic. One of the crucial problems that the investigated community-led initiatives are facing is the lack of financial support, i.e. the fact that they are dependent on a grant-based funding, which makes them financially insecure or even unsustainable. As stated by my interlocutors, the risks and limitations of temporary project

funding include challenges in availability of public funding, continuous project applications as well as difficulties in ensuring the long-term financial support:

> *"We are constantly applying for various projects. We are trying to get funds because we need funds for everything we want. (…) Somehow it goes on, we're glad about that. It's easy to get a project, but then it makes no sense to close the Radiona. (…) Because it's a waste of invested money if we lock it down later. I think that even local government units and utility companies should support us more, maybe financially."* (F, 43)

This consequently results in the economic precarity, temporary employments (while the project is active), constant employees' turnover, and personnel under capacity, affecting the sustainability of the initiatives and associations:

> *"It happened to us that you hire someone, and then you don't have for a salary. So that everyone who works must be prepared that it is not a permanent job. Maybe it turns into a permanent one, maybe not. So, I think that's the problem with all the associations. That institutional support."* (F, 43)

The impossibility of permanent employment results in the general employees' deficit, but also in the lack of professional staff and experts who would deal with specific tasks like application and implementation of the large EU projects, marketing, and similar.

> *"More employees would be needed, but those employees need to be paid. (…) I mean, you should have a professional who will write the project proposal and then you would get the project."* (F, 60)
>
> *"Of course, we lack capacity. We could do many more things if we had, I don't know, another engineer, another biologist and someone else who would write another project."* (F, 43)

Since the engagement in the civil society also implies volunteering, unlimited working hours, overloading of a small number of engaged individuals and financial insecurity, it often results in what my informants consider "a civil society burnout", which is characterized by exhaustion and cynicism:

> *"After ten years I had had enough. It is very difficult for me and my colleagues who are in civil society to work. (…) So, the basic problem is burnout. (…) The female inclusion or the*

female work in the non-governmental sector… we are all, almost eighty percent, I think there was a research, I read it a long time ago, after ten years you burn out." (F, 60)

Such a negative situation is further aggravated by weak or no institutional support. The need for supportive public policies and greater recognition by the local and regional authorities is something the interlocutors are aware that is crucial for the sustainability of the investigated associations and initiatives:

"Without such [institutional] *support nothing can be done. Because we can advocate, lobby, urge, encourage, educate, but the decisions are made elsewhere."* (M, 30)

"In my opinion, a workshop like this should be supported by the local community, because the local community definitely benefits from it. For now, it's all on our shoulders, on the Rojc Alliance and the Zelena Istria. We have already written a couple of projects related to that. (…) But I definitely think that the local community, the City of Pula, should play a role in this. In the sense that they support this workshop". (M, 49)

Besides the institutional support at the local (the City of Pula) and regional (the County of Istria) level, the interlocutors mostly emphasized the need for cooperation, networking and cohesion among associations, as well as the more active participation of other associations residing within the Community Centre Rojc. Instead of individual approach and a kind of competitiveness that is present among associations, which reduces the developmental possibilities and potentials of the whole Community Centre, they advocate for a more collaborative action with the goal of the common welfare:

"Because it is actually very important that the associations are not just some passive users, observers of some kind of changes that are happening, but simply that they actively participate in it. (…) On the other hand, Rojčani, that is, associations from Rojc, should be more active. They should be more actively involved". (F, 57)

"If it all functioned as a whole, well, it would be bursting with young people and events. And this is how it is now: this is mine, that is our part of the courtyard ... you know." (F, 23)

The same issue was notices by Mišković (2018) who claims that the associations at the Community Centre Rojc act independently of each other and that there is no high-quality

program synergy. This creates discontent among the associations since they do not all have the same priorities and goals, or a common interest. Another problem is the need for large investments in the infrastructure of the old building of Rojc. Many unused spaces and the lack of larger common spaces and disability-friendly access represent a significant obstacle in the further development of the associations' activities and work.

Despite the negative aspects and challenges that the associations are facing, the Community Centre Rojc is still recognized as a model according to which other brownfield sites could be transformed into community and cultural centres in other Croatian cities (Mišković, 2018). It offers the citizens of Pula a large number of diverse contents and activities, it has increased the possibility of social engagement and it is on the right track in making the local community aware of the benefits and necessity of applying the principle of solidarity economy in everyday life:

> *"There are of course many problems, but I think, simply, that the amount of social influence, programs, what we* [Rojc] *offer to the citizens all together, I think it is a huge influence."* (F, 43)

Its advantages are also the innovative model of management and a large number of members and users, which implies the diversity of knowledge and skills at their disposal, different areas of activity and many services and programs offered to the citizens in one unique building. The continuous learning on foreign good practice examples and networking with similar centres in Croatia and abroad, which the researched associations practice, positively affects the further development of the Centre. Perhaps one of the most significant positive aspects regarding its development perspectives is the fact that Rojc represents a unique place in the city which is very important in identity terms for many of its users. It represents a source of frequent social interaction and a venue for networking and socializing, contributing in that way to the production and maintenance of social cohesion and social capital, even transgenerational, as few interlocutors pointed out in the interviews.

> *"I've been coming here since I was young, and my child already goes to some activities here. I mean, we're very connected."* (F, 43)

The role of the community centre can thus be compared or even equated with the role that Forrest and Kearns (2001) assign to the neighbourhood. In such a sense, it represents "an

extension of the home for social purposes" and gives its citizens "a sense of belonging and identity" (Forrest and Kearns, 2001: 2130). In this vein Ellery and Ellery (2019: 237) argue that "creating a sense of place is important because it also develops a strong sense of community among those who live there". Creating the sense of belonging to a place is defined as the process of placemaking - public spaces act as centres for the community members and thus become important in the community development (*ibid.*). In the Rojc's inner courtyard many musical and cultural events are organized as well, and the younger generations in Pula have recognized this and gather in large numbers:

> *"A new generation of young people who come and use the Rojc's courtyard has been created. (…) Recently we had an event outside in the yard and there were many, many young people. (...) Young people come in the evening, they sit outside and hang out in the courtyard."* (M, 49)

Many of the Rojc members "grew up with Rojc" (they attended various extracurricular activities in Rojc since childhood), some of them were the founders of the Rojc Alliance and the first users of the Rojc facilities when it became a community centre. For this reason, they consider it a kind of community, or even their second home:

> *"Well, it's like being at home for me. I would sleep in Rojc if necessary. No problem. I would go to Rojc to drink coffee rather than to the city centre. To drink coffee from the coffee machine, but just to be there. (…) There is, really, when you enter Rojc and start to act, when that energy starts to be exchanged and you get and give something, and then when you really enter that ... it's a community. It really is a closed community, but at the same time it is open to anything."* (F, 23)

Despite the many challenges and problems they are facing, the general attitude of people working in associations within Rojc is very positive and optimistic, with a lot of enthusiasm and creative ideas and plans among the interviewees (especially the younger generations). This certainly represents an important prerequisite for the future development:

> *"As far as this topic is concerned, the solidarity economy and the circular economy, there is a lot of potential here* [in Rojc]*. There really is potential and, simply, maybe with a*

greater understanding of the local authorities, something could really open up. Some new situations." (M, 49)

"There is a lot of space there, and really when you have space and someone gives you a place where you can express yourself and work on yourself and your ideas, it can't be bad. And then you surround yourself with people who are so creative and then you connect, you network … let's do this, let's do that, let's go, and then anything can be done." (F, 23)

Concluding Remarks

Numerous community-led initiatives oriented toward solidarity, collaborative and sharing economy, inclusive society and the protection of the environment have been born in Croatia in recent decades. The majority of them emerged out of a civil society. The studied bottom-up associations and community-led initiatives within the Community Centre Rojc in Pula arose in response to various social, economic and environmental problems and needs. They rely on the principles of the social and solidarity economy and thus develop the local innovative dynamics that generates cooperation and promotes sustainable development in a social, ecological and economic sense. Their activities strive in the direction of a positive social change and the local community development, and having in mind the fact that they engage different age groups, those associations are considered promotors of principles and practices of the ocial and solidarity economy.

Community centres across the world, acting as centres of innovative practices, contribute to the positive changes in society and are considered incubators of new ways of working, living and creating sustainable communities. However, the way in which the activities of a community centre can contribute to shaping and strengthening social relations and social cohesion in a community, as well as promoting some positive changes in society, is generally an under-researched topic that deserves more attention in the future research. The Community Centre Rojc in Pula, besides being a community centre and „an advocate of innovative social practices and cooperation models" (www.rojcnet.pula.org), in this research also proved to be a locus of the social and solidarity economy practices. It promotes and develops values of the social and solidarity economy through the work and activities of few associations, but also through its

innovative concept of a participatory management model. Rojc attracts people who share similar opinions, ideas or interests and, as perceived by its users and members, represents a place where numerous innovative ideas and knowledge are shared, and where civic initiatives motivated by activism for the benefit of the community and the environment are born and realized. Through the activities of investigated associations and initiatives located in its premises, the Community Centre Rojc represents a site of production of diverse practices and values that have a positive impact on social, economic and ecological sustainability of the local community. Besides the innovative ideas and generally the strong enthusiasm among the main actors and members of the researched associations and activities, their perspective of development is additionally reinforced by the fact that they are located within the premises of a community centre. The centre offers the opportunity for people to meet, contributing to the social cohesion and to creating a sense of place with which individuals can identify. This positively affects the existence and the social impact of the investigated local community-led initiatives and associations. In spite of that, their contribution to supporting and promoting the social and solidarity economy practices and values (bottom-up) should be more recognized and further financially and organizationally supported by the local and regional authorities and public policies (top-down). The efficient collaboration between the civil society and the local government in the vein of a stronger and systematic financial, institutional, political and legal support should represent the basis for their sustainability and the further development of their activities. As Račić (2022) already noted in his research, the results and the future prospects of the social and solidarity economy sector in Croatia are greatly influenced by the fact that the incentive framework for their development is generally still incomplete and insufficient.

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“People must have hope and care for each other”: relational economies of solidarity, trust and care in the practices of Moje mjesto pod Suncem initiative

Duga Mavrinac

Ethnographic Museum of Istria (Pazin, Croatia)

Introduction

The solidarity economy movement, as a both theoretical and practical response to environmental deterioration, raging capitalism and corporativism, evades reductionist attempts of only one inherent form, structure, or definition (Kawano, 2009). According to Laville it is a hybridization between market and non-market economies (1998) consolidated in economic and social activities oriented towards finding a balanced combination between different resources (TALIJAN). More than a fixed form or format, it is an ongoing process and a multitude of manifestations and activities, aimed at carving an economy that serves society and the Planet. This process activates pluralistic approaches that follow a logic of sustainable development and economic citizenship, based on cooperative relationships of solidarity, ecological sustainability and socially just practices of production and consumption, inspired by cultural values that prioritize human beings and ethics at the heart of their work. Such efforts can be rooted, following Arjun Appadurai, in the struggles and contradictions of our time that motivates us to think of the future as a cultural horizon nourished by aspirations, projections, and imagination of social actors (2001). Alongside with this argumentation, the authors of the edited volume on practicing anthropology in troubled times of crisis, state that the challenge in facing economic, environmental, social or political adversities lies in “the difficulty of imagining potential parachutes” to navigate economic, environmental and social predicaments (Benadusi, Giuffè, Marabello and Turci, 2023: 9). This implies the need to empower and decolonize collective imagination in rethinking transformative

ideas and practices of living and co-habituating the world (ibidem). For instance, community-supported agriculture in contemporary Croatia exemplifies one such practice which steers ecotopias, in terms of Lewis Mumford's concept of utopia of reconstruction (Orlić, 2014, 2019). This and similar endeavors promote alternative practices to the profit driven neoliberal modes of production and consumption embraced of the post-socialist context (ibid). Nevertheless, Guérin et al. underline that a utopian view of solidarity economy practices needs to be combined with a critical analysis aimed at "examine the nature of social relationships that drive SE practices" (2021: 35 - 36). They argue that these initiatives not necessarily empower women and could, sometimes, reinforce or even generate inequalities (ibid.)

In Croatia, fragmented academic discourse scattered around various disciplines mirrors the slow emergence of SSE organisations and activities of the last fifteen years. In general, research testifies to a still hesitant process of establishing practices based on SSE, often relying on individual or small group enthusiasm, while actors themselves do not necessarily identify with SSE and are not familiar with its terminology and concepts (Orlić 2014; Puđak, Majetić and Šimleša 2016).

In this paper I want to address specific elements that make *Moje mjesto pod suncem* a social and solidarity economy project. I suggest that they operate not only as a platform that activates *the homo solidaricus* (Kawano, 2009: 14) but also produces practices of mutualism and solidarity by activating an economy based on a circulation of trust, care and solidarity as relational goods (Donati, 2019). The circulation of these goods creates a relational economy which activates/spurs social change and social reproduction.

"*A bunch of people and a bunch of needs*"; the initiative and the economy of time

While researching the degree of prevalence and the variety of solidarity economy practices in Istria and Primorje – Gorski Kotar counties, as well as the public and media discourses on SSE in contemporary Croatia, I had an opportunity to engage in fruitful conversations with members of energy communities, community-supported agriculture, and different socio-economic cooperatives in the cities of Pula and Rijeka and across the above-mentioned counties. Interestingly, at some point during our discussions many of them pointed me towards members

of the association *Moje mjesto pod suncem*. They described it as an inspiring and well-known initiative that successfully mobilized thousands of people and garnered remarkable visibility. I quickly realized the pervasive presence of this initiative in Rijeka's public sphere and its deep integration within the city's social fabric.

Moje mjesto pod suncem (engl. *My Place Under the Sun*) project took shape after an inspiring and successful campaign, led by a group of citizens under the wing of the NGO Centar za kulturu dijaloga Rijeka or CeKaDe (engl. *Center for Culture of Dialogue*) in 2014. The campaign called *Mreža hrane* (engl. The Food network) targeted the abolition of VAT on donated food. The latter while primarily focused on battling food poverty is also an attempt to transform the "world of food … the new politics of food provisioning and global fair-trade builds on imaginaries and material practices infused with different values and rationalities that challenge instrumental capitalist logics and mainstream worldviews" (David Goodman, E. Melanie DuPuis and Michael K. Goodman, 2012: 3).

On their web site and social media platforms CeKaDe presents itself as a non-profit civil society organization dedicated to "*fighting poverty and social exclusion and promoting the value of civil solidarity and social dialogue … it cultivates a sincere dedication to achieving its goals by encouraging active citizenship and civic participation, which resulted in the creation of an extremely broad and active community that follows and supports our work, made up of numerous volunteers, experts, advisors, business entities, public institutions, friendly associations and organizations, and others*"[31]. They operated, and continue to advocate, as a platform with the aim to put in touch legal and natural persons, build an effective national system of donating and distributing food and overall educate and promote change in public policies. The campaign was a success and situated CeKaDe on a wider regional and national stage as one of the leading actors in social activism and building citizen participation in social solidarity. While campaigning, in 2014 and the early months of 2015, the NGO members made a collective decision to initiate a new project called *Moje mjesto pod suncem* or MMPS. After a period of adjustment and steady growth, in October of 2020 and throughout 2021, they set up a big media and social networks campaign which resulted in raising the needed amount of two million and one hundred thousand

[31] https://www.mojemjestopodsuncem.com/o-nama

Croatian kunas (almost 280,000 euros) to renovate and open a new space for their activities. It is a bright and colourful space of approximately 370 square meters, located in an area close to the city centre. Owned by the University of Rijeka, the space, free of charge to use by the initiative, is also a professional base for teachers and students of the Faculty of Teacher Education in Rijeka which participates in the program's activities. The primary intent of MMPS was to tackle grass-root problems by focusing on children below the poverty line and breaking the cycle of poverty. This is done by providing a stimulating environment, wide range of inputs and information's, which would otherwise be inaccessible within children's own economic and social contexts. It meant organizing various activities aimed at improving academic achievements, boost self-esteem and offer systematic development support, for both children and parents, in the acquisition of knowledge and skills. These activities included tutoring, excursions, makeup workshops, psychotherapy, gym memberships, going to the theatre, museum, the movies and so on. By 2023, five staff members were employed, almost two hundred volunteers were activated and over three thousand workshops organised offering support to over one hundred children and eighty families. Importantly, the focus on social and economic equity is articulated through participatory practices and promotes citizen participation and social activism. When asked, Sandra one of the project leaders, rejects the definition of the initiative as humanitarian work which she views as a top-down approach that puts active donors and passive receivers in a paternalistic relationship. According to the still emergent field of the anthropology of humanitarianism this highly problematic a political act singles out individuals and groups as suitable objects of care, makes further cracks in the social tissue (Thelene, 2015: 505). Sandra continues "*it irritates and frustrates me terribly when someone says that what we do is humanitarian work, I have an aversion to that, … to state that some of us 'good people' are now helping some 'poor people', I really, really oppose to that, that implies a power relationship that is terrible and unfair*". Instead, the idea is to "*make a social change and move all together*, *became visible, create hope based on trust*". This is done by enabling a meeting ground between volunteers willing to share time, skill or knowledge, receivers and financiers. Sandra, again, is responsible for this segment of work. She dedicates her time in searching and promoting social entrepreneurship finds potential companies that could get involved, edits a monthly newsletter

which informs the companies involved, of the activities carried out in the past periods. Hence MMPS operates as a kind of a missing link for a triangulation in which ends meet and the needs from each side, companies, volunteers, beneficiaries, "*a bunch of people, a bunch of needs*" converge. But to provide such triangulations is both material and affective work. It means motivating, involving, giving meaning and inspiring all the parts involved. During our meetings Sandra, candidly remarked that running such a project is hard and intensive work. She often feels worn out and inadequate „*At this moment I feel totally exhausted and drained and if I could at this moment I would go away for a few months, to rest. The difficulties are handling all these people, we are allover the place and there is too much to organize"*. She must tacke and constantly find new ways to attract local entrepernuers. One succesfull example was a collaboration with a local restaurant and pizzeria. With collaborators and volunteers of MMPS Sandra supervised the designed of a special menu that offered individual dishes, the selection of which would automatically ensure a donation of a certain amount of money in favor of MMPS. Hence, the restaurant could offer to its customers a socially aware purchase combined with fine dining. This latter is an example of how MMPS activities go beyond simple network building and activate a social economy aimed at triggering mechanisms that can rebalance society, cohesion, solidarity.

Keep running up the project is ongoing and paid work and volunteering are intertwined. On a daily basis staff members coordinate various activities primarily designed to empower the individual. such as tutoring in different school subjects, after school day care for children, psychological and pedagogical supervision for children and adults and so on. In doing so, MMPS relies on a big pool of volunteers, a lot of whom are involved in programs of social mentorship which implies a mentoring and collaborative relationship between a mentor and a mentored person with a goal to bring about a positive change in the social status of individuals (child or adult). It is not as much a time consuming activity as it is an emotionally hard work. "*I struggle a lot with the feeling of frustration when someone doesn't want to take advantage of an opportunity that we offer them, but then Cvjeta Bišćević, a well-known permaculturist, helped me a lot, and she once told me "what grows, grows, and what doesn't grow, doesn't grow, stop pressure yourself*". So, in day-to-day activities of the initiative both productive and non-

productive time interlap, as does the paid work of the staff with the free of charge work of the volunteers. In fact the latter have cumulatively spent over five thousand and five hundred hours in volunteering[32]. They make use of what Lusini, Meloni and Zanotelli, call “busy free time” that is associate with the principles of leisure and of self-realization the values collective life sublimated in social solidarity (2019: 1-2). While analysing key notions of 'crisis' and 'mutualism', as essential topics of the contemporaneity (ibid.), the authors suggests that this engaged non-paid time becomes a form of an investment by transforming free leisure time in socially productive time in terms of creating social relations (2019: 2). One volunteer expresses her feeling about the engagement “*I sometimes wonder weather is me who supports them or is it vice versa. My life is fuller, richer and happier thanks to them* (op.a. the kids involved in the program).” So, for her to volunteer is to give meaning to her life, finding value in the relationships that are created while doing so. Zoran, the president of CeKaDe articulates the intent of the program to create a culture of volunteering that has continuity opposite to one-time ad hoc actions which do manage to mobilize tens of thousands but fail to keep their engagement on a permanent basis through longer periods of time. Both *Mreža hrane* and MMPS are creating a platform with the intent to create a mutually supportive society or what Lusini, Meloni and Zanotelli define, following George Simmel (1917) and consequently Richard Sennett (2012), as a particular sensitivity towards others which takes the form of an ethical disposition, as a practice and social competence in creating bonds (2019: 2). In my opinion, by doing so they are creating tools and common spaces of alternative economies in terms of economies of free non-paid time spent in productive affective and care work.

Trust and care as relational goods

As Cacciari reminds us the economic value of goods is no longer solely measured in terms of the basis of the physical units used in their production, but also on the basis of their emotional potential, that is, their ability to "set in motion", to excite the imagination of individuals as consumers, to attract their attention and stimulate their desire (2018: 7). The concept of relational good is increasingly being used in the social sciences, although jet relatively young to

[32] https://www.mojemjestopodsuncem.com/program

have a univocal definition. The category of "relational good" was introduced into the theoretical debate almost simultaneously by four authors, the philosopher Martha Nussbaum (1986), the sociologist Pierpaolo Donati (1986), and the economists Benedetto Gui (1987) and Carole Uhlaner (1989). While the economic approach to relational goods frames then as independent realities from the relationship itself and sees the good as distinct from the act of consumption, therefore tends to separate the good from the people who produce and consume it, for the American philosopher Martha Nussbaum, relational goods are those human experiences where it is the relationship in itself that constitutes the good. Hence, the relationship is the good and not a functional tool to economic exchange. More so, the identity of the other person(s) is essential: I can change hairdressers and the good 'hair cut' I can consume elsewhere, but if I change partners that specific relational good is destroyed because one friend is not as good as another. In his book *Scoprire i beni relazionali per generare una nuova socialità* (op. a. Discover relational goods to generate a new sociality), the sociologist Donati defines relational goods as "*a type of goods that are neither material things, nor ideas, nor services but consist of social relations*" (Donati, 2019: 11).

I this paper I suggest that the practices of all CeKaDe activities and projects, and specifically the MMPS initiative, activate and maintain the circulation of relational good between individuals involved in the project as well as MMPS and the community at large. These relational good consist of relations based on trust and care, and consequently their circulation and exchange add value to them.

A complex and multifaceted concept, trust plays a crucial role in understanding human societies and interactions. Generally defined as a belief or confidence in the reliability, honesty, and integrity of another person, group, institution or system. Overall, trust is a fundamental aspect of human social life that is shaped by cultural, social, economic, and political factors. By studying trust, cultural anthropologists aim to uncover the underlying mechanisms that govern social relationships and contribute to the broader understanding of human society and culture. In the article *Trust and the Other: recent directions in anthropology* Coates highlights the contextual and processual nature of trust that has various degrees in duration of time, different scales and complexity (Coates 2019). Helma Lutz underlines the relational, fragile and precarious nature of

trust that can be defined as "*the mutual expectation that neither party in a mutual relationship will exploit the vulnerability of the other"* (Sabel in Lutz (2011:81). So, although trust is expected from both parties it is not necessarily a fiduciary pact between equals. However, if it is based on a hierarchical relation it always hinges on expectations of reciprocity on both sides. Therefore some degree of authenticity is expected in interpersonal relationship, manifest availability, reliance on mutual understanding and mutual support.

I suggest that trust is a building block of MMPS modus operandi and a pivotal element of their "success". This trust is gradual created through long periods of time. CeKaDe member at the same time rely on and create new relations. For start they work on direct private and personal connections, informal relations that they have established during childhood, teenage years with childhood friends acquaintances. That is how, for instance they managed to get the support of an internationally famous designer Mirko Ilič who designed their logo and following that according to them "the campaign exploded". So trust is based on both informality and locality and is used as a resource. This engagement requires affective work that can be burdening. It means to verify the cultural gratuitousness of many people, sensitive and attentive to social issues, ready to get involved, recovering their dimension and consistency of values, grafting trust (restoring trust, having trust, gaining trust), according to coherence and transparency, weaving relationships that managed to bring creativity, ideas and strong values back to the roots of the economy. But when I spoke to the project leader, she confessed that she was having a hard time in dealing with all the support and the trust the public, the families and the children have given the: "*I am trying so hard not to make a mistake, but I will fail at some point, for sure, everyone makes mistakes sometimes …, it is a big responsibility*". So there is a degree of awareness of the value trust has in their activities. It goes down with the type of communication they are engaged in, trying to make it clear and direct, again often informal. This is also something that they themselves are promoting. It is both a testament to their work and a burden. Trust is a resource they use and a final goal to create and maintain. This time the trust of the larger community. This is because in their words the lack of trust on every level of the society is holding back social change and economic alternatives to emerge. "*Our society is based on distrust and it takes a hard*

work in building this trust, people must have hope and care for each other, micro steps … this is precisely what we do" It must be symbiotic and reciprocal.

Maintaining this trust, respect, and visibility requires care work, which is much more than life-sustaining practice. In here a care practices, contrary to being seen as consequences (kinship and feminist scholars have shown that) of a relationship, are deemed originators of relationships (Thelen 2015: 504). Many care processes centred on creating, maintaining, and dissolving significant ties, which ultimately aggregated to larger social formations, could thus be understood as exchange. Important element need (Thelen, 2015: 505). The centrality and value of time was analysed in caring consumption practices of Eco-mums (Cairns, DeLaat, Johnston, and Baumann, 2014), whose practices of care is both material and social and involves several layers of work in order to feed and provide food for their children. The MMPS workers and volunteers are also involved in care work practices. Their final goals is to "evoke ways of cooperation between people, and interaction between people and things" (Cacciari, 2018). In this way, their knowledge, abilities, their time, their availability are not found on the market in the function of profit maximization, but are found in the function of building a good relationships are a common social good and "they are economic goods to all intents and purposes that produce utility for people, communities of reference and society" (Cacciari, 2018: 2). The idea that everyone's time constitutes a collective heritage, a common good that must be managed and used by everyone equally, for the benefit of all. "those relational goods capable of generating beneficial interactions between people, creating sociality and solidarity, civil and emotional bonds, promoting good life and good living" (Cacciari, 2018: 9).

Because the economy is not just an economy of money (Cacciari, 2018: 4)… "economic are all forms of production, exchange and use of any good or service useful for the good life of the person (Cacciari, 2018: 4). So, in this example care and trust become mutually constituting while care work and relational work are closely intertwined. And these relationships become goods means attaching value to relations, they become a capital and can produce economic, social, symbolic, and cultural gain. It is worth reflecting on the "value of meetings". It follows the need to regain possession of relational spaces that allow us to develop relationships starting from

dimension of horizontality, from the social. Kada govorim o relational economies onda govorim o eco-sistema culturale di circolazione dei beni relazionali (Cacciari 2018:8).

Towards a conclusion

As we know, conventional economics has described reality by making invisible a full set of practices, initiatives, human relationships, and motivations therefore limiting us to imagine potential economic alternatives (Miller u Kawano 2009: 29) identify or gasp them on the field. In an era characterized by economic and social uncertainties, people create spaces of sociality, invent forms of sharing with transformative intentions and contestation of the existing. Many different paths and rejections of rigid definitions and blueprints. Fluid alliances of social, economic and institutional actors are being read as instances of new economic sovereignty, social resilience or inclusiveness (Grasseni, 2019 :48). The mutualistic initiatives of consumer cooperatives, associations and cultural solidarity centres, food solidarity and active citizenship projects, participatory actions of qualification of production in a direction of sustainability, are examples of situations in which the sharing of projects, objects, spaces and social times is not only a principle alternative consumption ethics (Bauman 2010) but a strategy of resistance and survival, a response to the needs related to the need to rethink in a conscious and critical way the use of resources, not only materials, lifestyles and the choices of daily life. A form on economy built upon relationships and ethics of care (Miller u Kwano 2009: 29). In this paper I suggest the MMPS project is economic in terms that it produces goods and creates a platform to make those goods circulate. While circulating and added value is being created. Different meanings of solidarity, equity, and sustainability. Transform society. Mostly, according to Sennett creating a context (as we saw platforms that connects people for the exchange of skills, services, time, availability, and goods) where dialogical collaboration works (Sennett 2012: 144), places where the " … *use of empathy is aimed at mutual boasting, being together in complexity and difference*" (Zanotelli, Luisini and Meloni 2019:3). "The production, exchange and redistribution practices based on solidarity i.e. on voluntary interdependent, inclusive and egalitarian relationship " (Guérin et al., 2021: 31)

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Caring is Daring: A Gendered Approach to Solidarity Economy

Orlanda Obad

Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research (Zagreb, Croatia)

Introduction

Years before participating in the project on solidarity economy in Croatia as an academic I participated in a solidarity economy initiative as a practitioner, a participant. Back in 2012, I joined one of the first so-called solidarity exchange groups (*grupa solidarne razmjene* or GSR in Croatia) in Zagreb, a form of community-supported agriculture group initially designed according to the Italian blueprint of *gruppi di acquisto solidale* / solidarity purchase groups (cf. Orlić, 2019, p. 15). The initial idea was to establish a direct and cooperative relationship with local, organic family farms who would, in return, gain access to a rather stable and reliable market consisting of educated and caring consumers.

Following a couple of years of relative stability and growth, practical and educational GSR activities changed our shopping habits. Over time, we became better acquainted with what is local and seasonal produce and more aware of obstacles that farmers are facing in various stages of food production, including the bureaucratic and policy-induced ones. All of it contributed to the building of solidarity within the group. Also, the bypassing of "eco-chic", commercial chains which profit greatly from "the rich, the sick, and the stupid" (cf. Rittig Beljak, N., Randić, M. and Obad, O. 2012) felt like a small but sweet personal victory over the system.

About the fourth season in, the inevitable breaking point took place: the fields of our primary producer of vegetables were struck by severe floods, and for an extended period they could offer but a few sorts of vegetables – the more resilient but also the less attractive ones, like cabbage or potatoes. That coincided with the introduction of another producer, and his varied offer of delicious vegetables grown in the tradition of biodynamic farming – perceived by some as a step

up in comparison to “ordinary” organic farming – stirred up our small community thoroughly. Some were sympathetic to the family of farmers who were introduced first, insisting that we remain loyal to the producers we originally committed to and continue buying whatever they had to offer. Other members – among which many joined in the later stages – expressed growing dissatisfaction with the GSR rules which they perceived as overly restrictive and ideologized. Some of the more consumer-oriented members insisted that the “disloyalty” which consisted of buying the newer producer's products, thus leaving the original one with less money, was understandable considering the circumstances. They also emphasized the leverage they held precisely as buyers and not „solidarity exchangers“, as they underscored that the strength of the group lies in its large membership and not its minority avant-garde core. Imposing overly strict and rigid rules would, they argued, turn people away and eventually affect the producers negatively as well.

The group, whose greatest majority consisted of women, had no official leadership as it was envisaged the decisions would be reached together, in regular group meetings. In time, however, some members insisted they were not obliged by the decisions voted on in those meetings because they did not participate. Some of them claimed that they could never attend such a meeting due to their lack of time. Nonetheless, they kept spending hours writing long posts on the forum. The most devoted members, who conducted the majority of organizing tasks, were frustrated with the turn of events but also reluctant to take more decisive steps as they did not have the legitimacy to expel somebody from the group or forcefully impose rules.

The subgroup of women that was more *caring*, more compassionate with the producers, and more concerned with the overall effects of their consumption choices, was also less daring in terms of protecting the group’s initial postulates as well as less willing to close the gate for the members who were pushing the more consumerist, self-centered agenda. They were empathetic and solidary with the consumers but also rather hesitant regarding confrontation or the possibility of breaking the rules or imposing them in a commanding manner. Eventually, some of the initial and more ardent members left. The group still operates on a weekly basis, albeit more as an unofficial, open-air market than an undertaking in sync with a broader social agenda that inspired this endeavor in the first place.

Theoretical Underpinning: Openness that Hurts

In many domains of the solidarity economy, women are at the forefront. An important part of critically examining its practices, therefore, demands a thoroughly gendered perspective. According to the study of the social and solidarity economy in Portugal, authored by Eduardo Pedroso (2019) on the part of Cooperativa António Sérgio para a Economia Social women form the majority of employees in many cooperative branches[33]. As much as 81,8 percent of the „social solidarity" cooperatives, which provide social and\or health services such as childcare, elderly care or services for people with disabilities, are women. Also, 74,7 percent of employees in the consumer branch, 64,5 percent of practitioners in culture branch, and 62 percent of employees in education cooperative branch are women as well (p. 154). There is no comparable data on this sector in Croatia, but women who participated as interviewees in this study consistently demonstrated their intense investment in the field, and their moral and affective challenging of the predominant ways of feeling-thinking (Jasper 2018) proved worthy of research on its own.

We shall approach the multifaceted phenomenon of solidarity economy through the components that most consistently appeared throughout our research: an amalgam in which empathy, caring, and striving for mutuality and connectedness are coupled with affective commitments (Jasper 2018) to broader social issues or causes. In this chapter, I shall approach these aspects, which form the „good" and „solidary" part of the equation, critically, by illuminating the broader affective backdrop as well as specific intersections of gender and care.

In the book "Feminism for the 99%", Cinzia Aruzza, Tithy Bhattacharya, and Nancy Frazer (2019) call for a united front in support of social causes such as "environmental justice, free high-quality education, generous public services, low-cost housing, labor rights, free universal health care, or a world without racism or war" (p. 15). It is a manifesto, a text meant to posit a program and propose a blueprint for realizing a set of goals and/or values, which represents a valuable example of the radical, leftist understanding of solidarity: there is a list of social causes one should care about and a call for fight against the usurpers, be it the capitalist state, corporate magnates

[33] Within the SOLIDARan project, cooperatives were approached as pertaining to solidarity economy.

or local and global warmongers. This mode of change, which echoes Marx and Engels, advocates for a class struggle through mass uprising, with feminists at the forefront (p. 20). Instead of the *lean-in,* liberal feminist strategy which encourages women to push harder individually to gain more power within the system, the manifesto advocates *kick-back* feminism. As the authors write: "We have no interest in breaking the glass ceiling while leaving the vast majority to clean up the shards. Far from celebrating women CEOs who occupy corner offices, we want to get rid of CEOs and corner offices" (p. 13).

If we agree on the ultimate goal – a radical, unwavering parting from or fight against the current "capitalist roots of metastasizing barbarism" (p. 14) – the proposal leaves us with the modest question: how? If one wishes to join in the *kick-back feminism*, how to go about it? If she were to take action, apart from signing an online petition or clicking a subscribe button for a newsletter, is she bound to be emotionally and physically drained by caring, frustration, and taking on the third shift of fighting the long, seemingly neverending list of social injustice?

Conservative authors may reduce the leftist intellectual elite's calls for solidarity with various minorities, „primitive cultures" and people that are repressed in one way or another to hypocrisy. As Roger Scruton writes in an article which focuses mainly on multiculturalism, it is about a „play with alternatives – a possibility which universities eminently provide" (Scruton, 1993, 97). A „radically rational" approach offers yet another perspective. In his book *Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion* (2016) Paul Bloom tackles empathy interpreted as a sort of contagion of feeling: „if our suffering makes me suffer, if I feel what you feel (…)" (p. 16). He insists on the fact that our capacities to empathize are very restricted and also that we are more prone to *feel the feelings* of people or groups of people that are „close to us, (…) similar to us, and those we see as more attractive or vulnerable and less scary" and that may have class, racial and other implications. That is also the reason, the author would argue, why we may be more willing to help save one single person in a dramatic situation than millions who slowly but regularly die of disease or hunger in a place remote from our homes, without dramatic media coverage.

On the progressive side of the political spectrum, however, rules are somewhat different: one may feel it is crucial to support people who may be distant in terms of geography, culture or class,

but important to the values one deeply cares about. In a subsection of an article on „radical solidarity“ whose subtitle reads „empathizing with the victims of social power“ Christian Arnsperger and Yanis Varoufakis (2003) distiguish between solidarity in which we empathize „with persons afflicted by some shared misfortune“ from radical solidarity in which misfortune is „a social artefact, as opposed to a accident of nature“ (p. 177).

It is a general tendency of human societies in all places and at all times to generate social power structures which place whole groups of people, quite arbitrarily, into ‘unfortunate’ roles and situations. Spontaneously, and through no fault of their own, they become victims of an evolved social force which expels them to the periphery of social life. A disposition toward making sacrifices on their behalf will be defined below as *radical solidarity*. (p. 177)

Thus, it is tackling the „root-causes of other's systematic disadvatage and misfortune“ which transcends mere „palliative efforts“ (p. 180).

Regardless of the quality of „input“ motives, we proceed with focus on „outputs“: questioning the constraints of our capacity for doing „good“ and our ability to engage and make sacrifices for others.

What solidarity may feel like in practice is thoroughly depicted in Romana Pozniak's (2022) study of humanitarian aid to refugees in Croatia during the mass transit in 2015 and 2016. The author argues that in the sectors of humanitarianism and activism the important surplus of values in the broader context of postfordist economy is „innate people-loving and unselfishess combined with workaholism, pronounced work ethic and self-discipline“ (p. 67). In humanitarian practices, whether voluntary or professional, an individual is regularly put in a position in which he or she is not physically capable of responding to every single person demanding help on any given day. It is precisely the ability to shut down one’s empathy and emotions, even in the face of imminent danger and suffering of the people they are supposed to be helping, that allows humanitarian practitioners not to succumb to “*professional burnout, secondary traumatization, and empathy fatigue*” (p. 137; italic in original). It seems to be about cruel affective management in which the heavy task of containing one’s urge to care for and empathize is highly individualized – a professional risk one is expected to overcome primarily on his or her own.

As one of Pozniak's collocutors succinctly put it, at the beginning of a humanitarian career there is a certain naivety in ignoring one's boundaries. It is also, at least in part, about a savior complex, which prevents a person from resting and taking care of herself had she "not had enough time to give support to each person which asked for it today" (p. 138). The very characteristics that draw people to helping others, such as increased sensibility to suffering and a sense of justice, which are traits that they share with many practitioners of solidarity economy, are the very reasons that may ultimately endanger their physical and mental health and turn them from saviors into victims of their own good intentions.

In an article on "caring entrepreneurship" Tea Škokić and I (2018) critique the very demand for caring that is pressed upon women in private lives as well as in professional fields such as entrepreneurship. We posit that "the informal women's practices, such as the inclination to unity and solidarity, turn out to be the basis of the economy because they maintain the functioning of social reproduction necessary for the unrestrained interweaving of neoliberal and patriarchal business practices" (p. 97). This „pre-existing condition" of enhanced empathy and proclivity to solidarity and cooperation among women is critiqued for its exploitative potential but, at the same time, it is not dismissed because of the possibilities it unfolds in the society. In this case, for example, it is about „socially responsible business, ethical approach to work and coworkers, empathy and cooperativeness" (p. 99). This troubling, double, and paradoxical relationship toward „caring" steered my research on the solidarity economy in Croatia toward examining the messiness and meandering in life strategies that result from practicing solidarity economy in everyday life.

Regarding the broader affective backdrop, Petar Bagarić (2015) critiques a specific form of, largely but not exclusively, progressive demand for openness, "staying in touch" that "prohibits detachment and distancing" while requiring the subject's "ability to flow and change" (p. 132). The call for boundary-less, immediate, bodily immersion with the Other, examined here through the rise of phenomenological approaches in anthropology but pointed to as an important sign of times of postmodern societies, is expected to escape the Cartesian, dualistic mind-body polarization and secure a direct, bodily immersion with the object of study. The author claims that instead of the prophesied increased understanding, such demand for radically immersive

approaches may actually diminish or altogether inhibit the understanding of the object of study, in that the "promoted openness and empathy easily […] become the subject's patronizing feature that ignores the painful and violent aspects of the nature of both reality and the Other" (p. 145). From this vantage point, the incessant, indiscriminate affective openness to the world is the privilege of the few, members of the creative class who *write on paper, not the skin* of people, and who have the backdoor option of restricted and/or controlled contact with the object of empathy and solidarity. When we descend from the world of ideas into everyday life, the grand concepts suddenly become less exciting and more prosaic; the talk about logistics, organizing, selecting, prioritizing, and – drawing boundaries.

From Theory to Methodology

In his exploration of solidarity economy from the Marxist perspective, Chris Wright (2021) claims that the transition from capitalism to post-capitalism is expected to happen progressively, „as new production relations sprout (initially) in the 'interstices' of a decaying order" via the gradual strengthening of cooperative modes of production and distribution. The change will be slow and gradual – the author mentions „at least a century or two" – until „an emergent economy has evolved to the point that it commands substantial resources, is highly visible, and is clearly more systemically 'rational' than the old economy". That is, Wright argues, an increasingly plausible scenario if the social context is one of „general economic stagnation and class polarization".

The author writes, commenting on the current confusion or lack of direction in political systems and institutions, that:

all this floundering opens up space for 'decentralized' innovation, grassroots experimentation, localism and regionalism, under-the-radar moves toward cooperativism. This slow, semi-interstitial process is the natural way in which social (economic) systems yield to their successors.

The research on this decentralized, local, under-the-radar transformation, thus requires compatible methodological approaches. Throughout the course of the research, which started in June 2020 and finished in May 2022, I interviewed 35 people. My initial case study revolved around a cooperative brewery in the coastal town of Zadar, which was founded by two young

women. From that point of departure, my research spread out to include other key actors of the solidarity economy in Croatia so that it eventually encompassed multiple field sites.

Most of my interviewees were women in their 30s and 40s with rather varied educational and class backgrounds, and they also originated from and lived in different parts of Croatia, both urban and rural. In this chapter, I will present insights from several interviews and ethnographic fieldwork.

Part One: On Motivation or What Feels Good

In all instances, the motivation of my interviewees to enter various kinds of „solidarity entrepreneurship" defied the economic paradigm of necessity versus opportunity, according to which people are either forced to become entrepreneurs to make a living, or they enter the field because they spot a business opportunity. Also, the discrepancy between the market and the social side, noted by Davorka Vidović (2012) in a study of social entrepreneurship, was not as pronounced in the interviews. The avant-gard of solidarity economy was far more concerned with the latter, and more often than not, they chose that end of the bargain even at the expense of their livelihood. Although they were extremely entrepreneurial when it came to realizing their goals, their actions were rarely aimed at gaining economic success. Most of the time, it was more about accomplishing transformative social impact in their immediate surrounding. Their goals included setting up the best possible workplace for themselves and their coworkers, community-building, enjoying what they do, and exiting the wearing-down work rhythm of institutional frameworks, etc.

In some cases, their organizations or initiatives have evolved organically, over a longer period. When choosing a high school, one of my interviewees, a 40-year-old woman who resides close to a small rural town in North-Eastern Croatia, decided to enroll in the Agricultural school in Zagreb despite her mother's preference for a more art-related school. She could not fathom, as she explained, a school with no biology classes in it. In Agricultural school, which is often deemed one of the least desirable ones in Zagreb, she was introduced to an initiative aimed at the preservation and exchange of traditional crop seeds. It would be the beginning of her later trailblazing career in permaculture and agroecology.

The school mostly consisted of people who were there because they would not be able to get in anywhere else. And then there were us, who were really interested, and who came there to get the knowledge and the skills. And I loved those four years dearly! It was simply a great decision and I adored just how practical the knowledge I was getting there was. Not that it was all easy, on the contrary. I ended up working really hard for some classes. But I loved it. And it is also where I first developed my interest and appreciation for seeds. Especially preserving the traditional crop seeds. Had I enrolled somewhere else, I wonder whether I would have discovered that interest of mine.

In other examples, the initial motivation was less about what we could categorize as „social impact“ than about intimate needs and subtler, inner impulses. In the following example my interviewee, a woman in her 40s nowadays living in a rural outskirt of Zagreb, agrees that the initial motivation for her founding an alternative local social center primarily had to do with feelings of isolation and solitude during her maternal leave. Many young mothers experience this sense that the city is in no way adapted to parents, especially mothers with small children. Sidewalks may be too narrow or overly exposed to cars for strollers to pass by safely, most cafes in Croatia are still not smoke-free, there are few clean and safe spaces to change a baby's diaper, and many women, for one reason or another, avoid breastfeeding in public. In most of Zagreb's quarters, there is not much to do apart from strolls up and down the street or an occasional cup of coffee on a terrace when the weather permits.

For my interviewee, it was an impetus to set up a space that would be friendly to mothers with small babies but also to everybody else with a similar urge for a supportive community and non-commercial space open to the public. Once she rented the space, however, she did not immediately start the revolution in her neighborhood.

Truth be told, I was still alone in there (…) with my two kids, and every now and then another mother would drop by from somewhere else. In my own neighborhood, I had this feeling that nobody, you know, that there was nobody in the neighborhood, that no one… Simply, as you said it yourself, everybody was focused on themselves within their own four walls and I guess they did not have the same need as I did. But mothers from [other parts of the city] would burst in for a coffee and then the two of us talk, hang out, and kids, you know, they would crawl on the floor…

And it is easier this way to share some experience you have, trauma… Or happiness. It is nice to share it. So, I guess there were not many people like that at that moment, but still, there are some. And [the center] for me was the perfect form for that because we, who are like that, could meet. (…) We are not satisfied with that average, with that which is normal in the mainstream. We are not satisfied with it and if we have a need we will try to solve it at all cost, and satisfy it. We will not leave it, like… It can't be done. Let's see how it can be done!

At another point in the interview, she also mentions that they „did not go into it to become saints, for people to appreciate them for it, we were satisfying our needs in a way that felt natural".

In another example, we see even more clearly that it is about joy and inner satisfaction. In the following quote, my interviewee is a veteran climate change activist, journalist, and long-time member of a bike kitchen in Zagreb – a place that helps people repair their bikes and that, in some cases, organizes collection, repair, and distribution of bicycles for various groups of people in need.

Kernel of her motivation to join the bike kitchen consists of the joy of fixing these vehicles, manipulating bike parts, and getting hands dirty with black grease, all to witness, in the end, the positive response of those who came in need of repair. Asked how the Zagreb bike kitchen Biciklopopravljaona succeeds in being inclusive in terms of class, while many solidarity economy organizations and initiatives seem to primarily draw people with middle-class backgrounds, this interviewee portrays bikes with unreserved, genuine admiration, and straightforward, almost axiomatic wording.

There is this magical word and that is the bike. The bike is an almost perfect machine that has this huge potential, [in many cases] it became clear that it can matter a lot. It was, for example, important in the women's emancipation movements... The bike is, you know, important when we speak of environment and climate change and traffic and organization of the city and health and… I don't know. (…) It may not be the solution, but in any case most people feel better with the bike, one way or another. (…) And at the same time, it is not expensive. It does not require, it does not require a large financial investment, yet it assures covering more needs. You can, at the same time, cover your need for transportation, for movement, health, freedom…

A more classic way of dealing with such needs within civil society would be writing up a project, getting it funded by the European Union or another funding source available, purchasing the bikes, and then distributing them. This manual, slower, and time-consuming way of Biciklopopravljaona, however, accomplishes other functions as well. Some have to do with ecology, waste, circular economy, and climate change. Another important function is rebuilding the social fabric and rehumanizing interpersonal relations, and such processes cannot be easily projectified. One could wonder whether packaging it into milestones and deliverables would diminish these subtler, intangible qualities and contributions.

Throughout the years this bike kitchen has, for example, distributed hundreds of bikes. In one sole year, 2021, my interviewee recounts, 250 bikes were taken, repaired as needed, and handed out. It entailed hundreds of unpaid working hours. And, according to my collocutor, for many people who were given bikes, like migrants, this bike kitchen was the first and only place in Zagreb where they felt they were regular, equal members of the community instead of special, exempt, marginal people.

Inner satisfaction and joy intertwined with community-building are important sources of motivation. Should we consider that disruptive to the current order of affairs?

In their book on postcapitalism and work, Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams (2015) claim that the main ideological underpinning of contemporary work ethic bonds remuneration and suffering. To get paid means to endure suffering. Working while enduring suffering of one kind or another is the paramount *rite de passage*, the transition into adulthood. This is why the authors conclude that it is precisely the deeply engrained work ethic that we have to overcome first for the capitalist order of things to be truly challenged and transformed. Work ethic has invaded our lives to such a degree that many people cannot, as Srnicek and Williams claim, „imagine a meaningful life without work“. The internalized *horror vacui* is menacing to the extent that it is in itself capable of turning us into competitive subjects seeking competitive forms of self-realization while making our job posts the primary means of accomplishing meaningfulness. Such a hierarchy, however, takes its toll on people's mental and physical health as well as their overall well-being. The described forms of motivation to enter the solidarity economy may, from the predominant order of things, appear whimsical, utopian, or even child-like and naive. But we

could also interpret them as approaches to work/life that have not succumbed to the demands of the pedagogy of suffering.

Part Two: The Price of Doing Good

In the following example, my interviewee explains how she first quit her well-paid job at a public utility company because she simply could not continue with the 9-to-5 routine she was expected to follow. It took time for her husband to fully accept her decision and he supported her on the condition she earns a certain amount of money necessary to pay some of the household expenses. Years later, her new way of living and working became incongruous with the suffering endured by her husband at his well-paid, corporate job.

We would literally, you know, kids would go to sleep and we would sit down once a week, open a bottle of beer and start talking. And he would always, you know, talk about his job. And all the time, all the time he would come from work pissed off… His stomach hurt, he got some allergies… His health, you know, started to deteriorate. Both psychologically and physically. And I got him one day to bet: quit your job and do not work for one whole year. Just meditate, go fishing with the boys, and you may cook and clean at home if you want. If not even that, okay. Do not do anything which does not bring you joy. Just do what makes you happy and see you in a year with this beer again and you will tell me how you feel. And this is where I got him to bet.

When I ask her how they live now and how this cut in income impacted their family budget, my interviewee explains that her family of four is frugal and does not need much money anyway. She gives me an example of how their green basket, which they order directly from a farmer every week, costs a bit less than 7 euros and lasts them the whole week. Also, as her husband has quit his stressful job, he has enough time and energy to put extra effort into renovating a house she has in the meantime inherited in a rural part of Zagreb. After selling their apartment and paying off their debts, they have recently opened a new cooperative social center in the part of the city they moved to, where many young families reside but which also lacks content and initiatives that would contribute to community building.

Overall, the question of paying the price for „practicing for the future“ within the realm of solidarity economy was one of the most contested questions in the interviews I performed. Some

of the interviewees were adamant and expressed no regrets regarding their choices which, more often than not, put them in precarious positions in terms of their everyday existence. They put their bet on the unsustainability of the present system and from that perspective living a modest, frugal life was often perceived in itself as a recipe for a more sustainable future. I remember vividly a GSR member telling me, on a hot summer in Zagreb, how annoyed she was with people asking her where was she going to spend the summer. Not, that long ago, my grandparents' generation, had no vacation at all, she said. People would just stay where they lived and that was that, what sea, what vacation!, she raised her voice with an undertone of exasperation.

Another one of my collocutors is enamored in marathon bike rides across the country and beyond. She combines materially minimalist lifestyle with regular trips to nature, including on weekdays, which many „regular" workers would probably think of as luxurious and out-of-reach outside the planned weekend and holiday trips. She explains that what is proposed as a solution toward reducing the problems with climate change greatly revolves around localization, around how to find ways to satisfy all or at least most of our needs in our immediate surroundings. My interviewee stresses that she counts joy and fun in „needs" as well. We need to figure out how to enjoy ourselves and have fun around us, without necessarily spending a fortune on it, without needing to spend many resources on it, she concludes.

At other times, however, my questions about the ways in which these choices reflected upon the quality of their lives were met with pensive silence. There were women who were nearing their 40s, who may have wished to have children but who did not have the means or capacity to form a proper infrastructure for such an endeavor. Some interviewees admitted that they have not figured it all out yet and discussed coming to terms with the realization that in the near future, they may have to prioritize their own needs, such as buying an apartment or finding a steady income, over their solidarity-economy activities.

At all times, however, the sacrifices they made were waged against the alternative – going back to or entering the regular 9-to-5 workforce – almost without exception at the expense of the latter.

What I see, when people ask me, you know, why [we do it] and then it is always the question. We do it because we can. Why do we do it? We do it because we can. And really from the position

that I can… Like… You know… I can do it… It's: WOW! I can really do it, you know, I can have that enormous impact on the community, you know, and that can spread on further…

More often than not, the people I talked to combine different sources of income to get by within the present system. Many times, just to do what they enjoy doing and consider the most important without getting paid, they find other, more reliable sources of income. The following interviewee works part-time for a private company and leads an organization of civil society through which she occasionally obtains funding for various projects on organic family farming while she also volunteers in various initiatives related to the solidarity economy. She says it is very hard for her to define what the word „job" actually means.

You know?! Because you do some things, I don't know, if job is only when you get paid… Sometimes you get money for nothing, at other times you work yourself to death. And sometimes you do more important stuff volunteering than what you do for money. (…) You may do stuff that makes no sense to you at all for money, and that generates income. It is hard to draw the line, you know…

Part Three: On Psychologization and Counterpsychologization

Veering from the usual path, along with the price that it entails in many instances elicited searching for a deeper meaning among my interviewees From that point, the conversation would usually turn in one of two directions: psychologization or spiritualization.

The latter involved expressing trust in the helping hand of a larger spiritual entity – the universe, energy, fate, God – once one is aligned with her true life path and purpose. Some of my interviewees with a more spiritual, and not necessarily religious bent, ranging from practices that could be subsumed under the New Age umbrella to a broad belief in „spiritual justice" interpreted their choices and consequences thereof as not particularly courageous as the alternative – things remaining as they were before – was simply not tenable.

One of my collocutors explained how at this point in her life, nearing the age of 50, still finds herself worrying about some decisions and uncertainties.

So, now when I even get a thought: Jesus, how we shall manage? [I think to myself] God, why do you still ask yourself that? When so many times you have learned that things will work out one

way or another and whatever happens you need to say: I am really interested in seeing how this one will end up well. And as a matter of fact it always, you know, ends well, even if at some point it seems hopeless and stupid and pointless. (…) It is stupid to become nerve-recked about… About anything.

She explains that in an easygoing fashion, thus conveying the message that worrying itself is a mechanism that keeps us in control, scared of stepping out of the predominant ways of operating. From this perspective, choosing safety over change is not a safe choice as avoiding change leads to certain suffering.

Other collocutors were more likely to resort to the psychological explanation of their proclivity for solidarity, empathy, and helping in general. In the following excerpt, my interlocutor reckons with deeper inner, psychic mechanisms behind her motivation to do good in the world and to dedicate her time to the fight for social causes.

I did not do that so I can prove myself to someone but because I saw an opportunity to, I don't know (…) You know, I can form a group that will help someone I know to sell their produce. (…) It really is a powerful feeling and it forces you to… to work relentlesly because you feel great and it makes sense to you. (…) I can't say I have a perfect private life, on the contrary, it is quite shitty in a lot of ways (laughter)… I compensate, you know, also, you know, certain personal unfulfillment here and so I don't know, you know, I can do here something that is great and so it is not hard for me.

Others also reflected on their deep urge to be solidary or to sacrifice their immediate needs for a greater good as a form of defense mechanism with its roots in complicated, sometimes even traumatic childhoods. This whole field of economy is, as an interviewee states, filled with people whose early lives were unhappy and who are now trying to save others since they could not save themselves when they were little.

I would, however, propose reversing this psychologizing lens toward the system we currently live in, the global capitalist one as well as its peculiar local variant, to examine the patterns of its antisocial traits we are all indifferently subject to and forced to live by. Describing capitalism as antisocial is by no means an original idea but psychologizing its mechanisms may seem to be precisely what some of the leftist approaches are against – taking away from the brutal logic of

the system. Nonetheless, it may be illuminating to interpret its modes of functioning such as aggressiveness, deceitfulness, or lack of remorse,[34] as pathological in the ordinary sense of the word, in that the „alternative" responses to it may be viewed more as a response that is corrective and logical and not hypersensitive or guilt-induced one.

If greediness is the byproduct of the capitalist system, it may, indeed, be misleading to direct the critique toward the personal greediness of capitalists. In the opposite direction, we may be prone to regard the longing for dignity, freedom, mutuality, and solidarity found in the actions of solidarity economy actors not as a sign of a personal, overempathic, bleeding-heart distortion but as a blueprint for what may become a predominant way of functioning in the future.

Instead of Conclusion: Solidarity as a Refugium for the Sane

The solidarity that I witnessed throughout my fieldwork was dense internally, within the initiative or organization, among the coworkers and members, and it spread out to the outside, supporting other enterprises or causes, and joining the more strategic, frontal forms of actions. The organizations and initiatives I researched are social laboratories of sorts in which alternative modes of functioning are practiced through trial and error. As the primary affective mode I encountered throughout my fieldwork on various sites where solidarity economy is practiced evoked the notion of rest, relief, autonomous functioning, and even parallel reality I prefer to use the notion of refugium. This term is employed in „Refugia: Manifesto for Becoming Autonomous Zones" by the cyber(feminist) art collective subRosa (2002).

Natural sciences define the term refugia to designate „areas in which a population can survive through an extended period of unfavourable conditions" (Wittmann 2022, 59). They can be defined as „habitats or environmental factors that coupled with morphological, life history, and behavioral attributes of animals reduce the impact of disturbance" (Lake, Bond, Reich 2006, p. 47). According to subRosa's manifest, refugium may, among other things, be: „[a] critical space of liberated social becoming and intellectual life; a space liberated from capitalist Taylorized production; a space of unregulated, unmanaged time for creative exchange and play;

[34] In psychiatry, these three patterns of behavior are regarded as common traits of antisocial personality disorder. For more on definition of antisocial personality disorder see Walsh and Wu (2008).

experimental action and learning, desiring production, cooking, eating, and skill sharing; (…) a space of convivial tinkering; a commonwealth in which common law rules“.

It is, as they state, “not a retreat, but a space resistant to mono-culture in all its social, environmental, libidinal, political, and genetic forms”. It is also „[a] reproducible concept that can be adapted to various climates, economies, and geographical regions worldwide”. And, most importantly, “any useless space can be claimed as a refugium”, as the manifest lists, the edges of agricultural lands, suburban lawns, rooftops, vacant urban lots, office buildings, and fallow land. When applied to solidarity economy organizations and initiatives examined in this research, it is also a space in which new modes of production and understanding of „added value“ are practiced. In many of them, women are leading the way toward a more egalitarian, just, and inclusive economic ecosystem in ways that, for the greatest part, remain publicly unrecognized. This mode of solidarity is capable of cutting across many a disadvantaged background. One's capacity and willingness to cooperate and share are its central tenets and a decisive factor in the solidarity economy's openness and closedness. Also, the existence of boundaries of the primary „inside“ within which the densest forms of solidarity are practiced may act toward preventing „doing good“ from becoming the source of (self)-exploitation.

In the following quote the interviewee, a pioneer of permaculture in Croatia, answers the question of how she understands the sometimes tumultuous, chaotic state of affairs in the solidarity economy by quoting a friend of hers. The quote mentions the areas that border with wilderness which are, according to permacultural landscape design, deliberately left intact to enhance diversity.

It is about what you have in permaculture, bordering areas, you know, for example, the transition between a meadow and woods. And it is an area in which there is the greatest diversity. Just as well, in human communities you have, you know, bordering areas of people who are capable of entering such alternative… But they are borderline themselves, you know, there is always chaos there and who knows what. (…) They are important because they are pioneer species. They take an area that nobody else wants to and then, when at some point it becomes more mainstream, people who are more stable come in and they create more stable communities. It is some form of, I don't know, natural succession. It makes sense to me, that sort of ecological explanation.

An area in which women participate at the forefront, which is not necessarily attractive in terms of economic or symbolic gains, which is cultivated and experimented with through painful sacrifice and joyful advances, and in the end offered for the more mainstream modes of functioning to take it over and benefit from it. That may be the way to think of how the solidarity economy organizations and initiatives contribute to global solidarity movements today.

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Social enterprises and their ecosystems: managing a multi-territorial network to achieve viability and impact[35]

Domagoj Račić[36]

Knowledge Network - Mreža znanja d.o.o. (Zagreb, Croatia)

Paula Damaška[37]

Green Energy Cooperative – Zelena energetska zadruga (Zagreb, Croatia)

Introduction

Social entrepreneurship provides and addresses opportunities for social change through entrepreneurial activity. OECD (2010) broadly defines it as entrepreneurship aimed at providing innovative solutions to unsolved social problems. That entails identifying and providing new services that improve the quality of life of individuals and communities, as consumers and/or producers.

Similarly to other forms of entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship does not exist in a vacuum, but in a given social, political, economic, cultural and institutional context - which is often described in terms of 'entrepreneurial ecosystems'. Such ecosystems comprise actors, institutions, policies and stakeholder networks that influence and/or are influenced by social enterprises, and consequently affect their development, growth and impact (cf. Moore, 1993, Mason and Brown, 2014). The emergence and development of effective entrepreneurial ecosystems is not a trivial task even in the case of profit-oriented entrepreneurship in developed

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[36] Domagoj Račić, Managing Director, Knowledge Network - Mreža znanja d.o.o. (e-mail: domagoj.racic@mrezaznanja.hr). The author acknowledges support of the Croatian Science Foundation, within the project Solidarity economy in Croatia: Anthropological perspective (SOLIDARan), IP-2019-04-3946.

[37] Paula Damaška, Project Manager, Green Energy Cooperative – Zelena energetska zadruga (e-mail: paula.damaska@zez.coop).

countries with supportive institutions. When the focus is shifted onto social entrepreneurship, which seeks to fulfil a more ambitious social, economic and environmental agenda, the task becomes even greater. If such a task is undertaken in countries with underdeveloped institutions, the lack of tradition and recognition of social enterprises, and underdeveloped social entrepreneurship policies with weak capacities and limited resources, developing effective entrepreneurial ecosystems become rather difficult.

Social enterprises in many countries face a lack of legal recognition and insufficient institutional and financial support. Although the term is widely used, social enterprises are still conceived in significantly different ways by national legislations, strategies, policies, scholars and social entrepreneurs (EC, 2020). Mainstream enterprise policy instruments often do not acknowledge the specificities of social enterprises and are insufficiently adjusted to their needs. The lack of similar social enterprises and weak advocacy efforts may preclude their recognition as a legitimate policy actor and/or policy beneficiary (cf. Račić, 2022). The ecosystems that support the emergence and development of social enterprises are therefore often weak. On the other hand, social enterprises respond to important societal challenges that are relevant to multiple stakeholders at different territorial levels. Their innovative practices may generate interest, recognition and financing outside of the boundaries of local or national entrepreneurial ecosystems (cf. EC, 2020). This multi-territorial nature of stakeholder networks in which social enterprises are embedded often stems from the ecosystem gaps, which prompt social enterprise to overcome weaknesses at one territorial level by utilising opportunities at other levels - and thereby seek overall viability and impact.

The paper outlines and applies a conceptual framework for the process of identifying stakeholders managing stakeholder networks which comprise local, national and international levels. Key stakeholders can be identified and categorised by their level of salience (based on Mitchell, Age and Wood, 1997) and by the material and symbolic resources a social enterprise obtains from them and/or provides to them. After this introduction, the second section of the paper explores the notion of entrepreneurial ecosystems and their applicability to social entrepreneurship. The third part is devoted to the notion of stakeholder networks as components of entrepreneurial ecosystems in which social enterprises are embedded. The

conceptual framework is subsequently applied to a case study of the Green Energy Cooperative (GEC) from Croatia, which was founded to facilitate local communities in planning, development, management and financing of renewable energy sources and energy efficiency projects. Finally, some concluding remarks are provided in the last section.

Entrepreneurial ecosystems and their applicability to social entrepreneurship

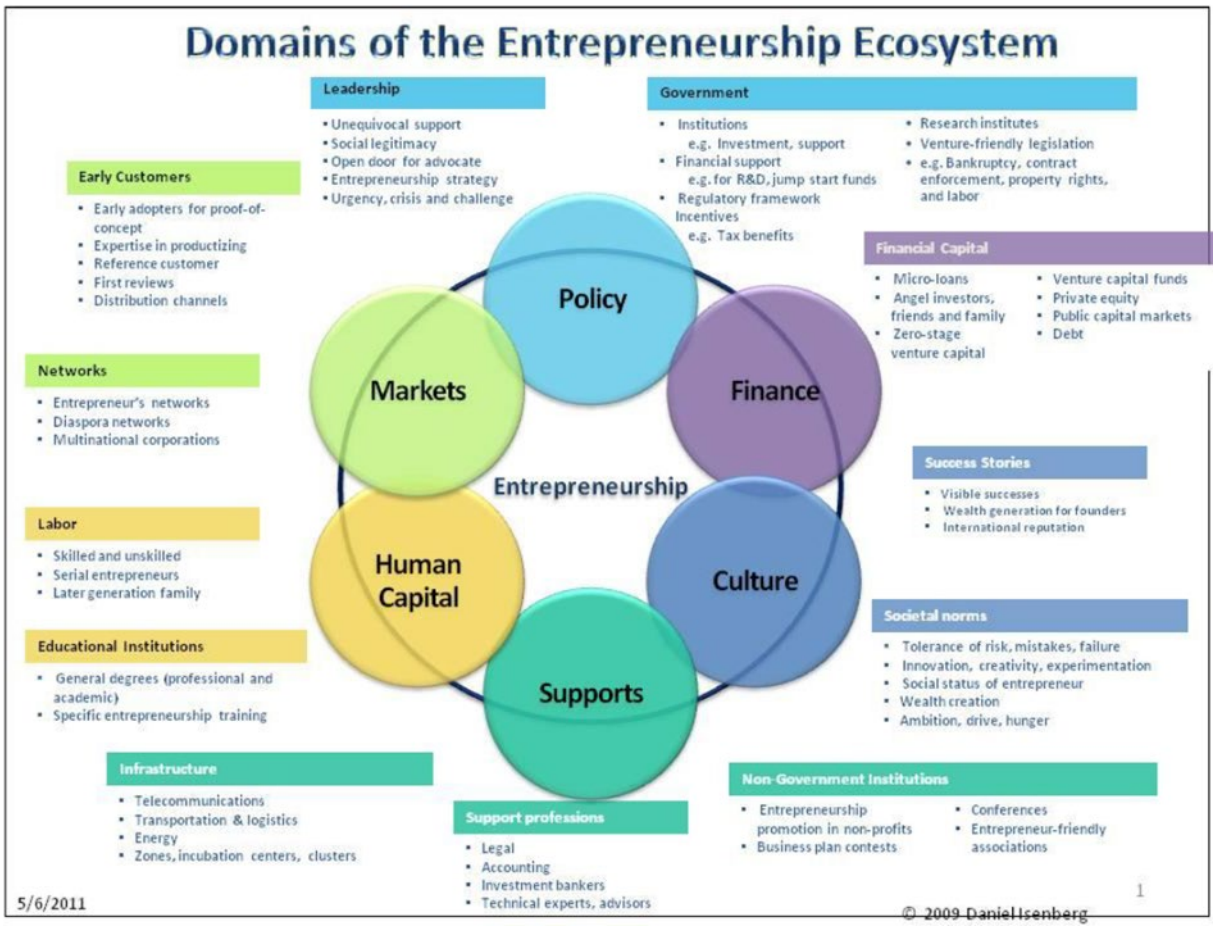
The contextual dimension of entrepreneurship development is usually captured by the term 'entrepreneurial ecosystem'. The notion of ecosystem was coined by Moore (1993) who studied the relationally embedded nature of firm interactions with suppliers, customers, financiers and other stakeholders. Similar ideas about the positive effects of geographical proximity, clustering and ongoing interactions of dense stakeholder networks have been postulated even before. Alfred Marshall's work inspired research into industrial districts (e.g. Piore and Sabel, 1984), whereas complementary perspectives have focused on clusters (e.g. Porter, 2000), knowledge and learning regions (e.g. Keeble and Wilkinson, 1999) and regional innovation systems (e.g. Cooke, Uranga and Etebarria, 1997). Recent relevant research on entrepreneurial ecosystems emphasised the issues such as contextual factors (Acs, Autio and Szerb, 2014, Brown and Mason, 2017) and linkages and relations within the system (Brown and Mason, 2017, Motoyama and Knowlton, 2017), the role of policy (Isenberg, 2011) and entrepreneurial universities (Guerrero, Urbano and Fayolle, 2017).

The concept of entrepreneurial ecosystems has evolved over time, but its main features are fairly stable. Based on a literature review, Mason and Brown (2014) define it as a set of interconnected potential and existing entrepreneurial actors, entrepreneurial organisations, institutions and entrepreneurial processes which formally and informally combine to connect, mediate and govern the performance within the local entrepreneurial environment. Although effective entrepreneurial ecosystems are likely to increase the likelihood of the emergence and growth of new firms, the key policy challenge that entrepreneurial ecosystems attempt to address is support to high-growth businesses rooted in the ecosystem. The development and eventual scaling up of high-growth enterprises is expected to create jobs, economic prosperity, additional demand and knowledge spillovers within the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Such cases of

'blockbuster entrepreneurship' (Napier and Hansen, 2011) are particularly important for entrepreneurial ecosystems, as they create both tangible and intangible benefits, including demonstration effects, serial entrepreneurship, and contributions to new start-ups (cf. Brown and Mason, 2017). Although linkages between multiple actors in multiple territories also exist, the research on entrepreneurial ecosystems largely gives preference to local/regional environments characterised by geographical proximity of stakeholders and a relative intensity of interactions within the system (Mason and Brown, 2014). A notable exception to this notion is the concept of the 'national systems of entrepreneurship', proposed by Acs, Autio and Szerb (2014). Their approach emphasises the institutional embeddedness of entrepreneurship within national (eco)systems, which are viewed as resource allocation systems driven by individual-level opportunity pursuit, through the creation of new ventures, with country-specific institutions regulating the outcomes of individual action.

In practice, entrepreneurial ecosystems are multi-actor, multi-level systems with a heterogeneous nature (Motoyama and Knowlton, 2017). Mason and Brown (2014) propose a taxonomy which recognises four aspects of the entrepreneurial ecosystem that can be targeted by national and regional policymakers. Within ecosystems, they distinguish entrepreneurial actors (entrepreneurs and supporting entrepreneurial infrastructure), entrepreneurial resource providers (finance, academia, large firms), entrepreneurial connectors (associations and matchmakers) and entrepreneurial orientation (e.g. values and entrepreneurship education). An influential model of the structure of the entrepreneurial ecosystem has been proposed by Isenberg (2011). He identified six domains within the entrepreneurship ecosystem, which are then subdivided into more specific elements. These domains are human capital (labour and educational institutions), finance, markets (early customers and networks), policy (government and leadership), culture (societal norms and success stories), and supports (infrastructure, support professions and NGOs). Each of these (sub)domains and their elements can play a conducive role in the development of entrepreneurship in a specific area, but they can also strongly reinforce each other. Isenberg thus advocates a holistic policy perspective towards ecosystem development. His model is presented below.

Figure 1. Isenberg's model of an entrepreneurship ecosystem



Source: Isenberg (2011: 7)

Mason and Brown (2014) notice that entrepreneurial ecosystems usually emerge in locations with place-specific assets and then outline some of their distinguishing features, which are broadly consistent with Isenberg's (2011) model. The central role is typically played by large, technology-intensive businesses with management, R&D and/or production facilities. Such businesses attract and develop human capital (including future entrepreneurs), create demand and technology spillovers. Entrepreneurial ecosystems also have numerous serial entrepreneurs and business angels, which (re)invest their knowledge and capital following successful exits or acts as mentors to new entrepreneurs. Furthermore, the ecosystems are 'information-rich', due to knowledge flows which stem from business collaboration, personnel movement, individual and organisational linkages and events. Access to finance is also important, with an emphasis on seed and start-up investors which provide both finance and support. Mason and Brown (2014)

acknowledge, but somewhat downplay the role of universities in entrepreneurship facilitation[38]; that role is more related to education than to successful technology transfer, which rarely results in high-growth enterprises. Finally, service providers such as lawyers, accountants, recruitment agencies and business consultants also play a role.

An entrepreneurial ecosystem, as any ecosystem, needs to generate value (monetary and non-monetary benefits) within the ecosystem and then distribute the value among the actors within (and sometimes also outside) the ecosystem (cf. Clarysse et al., 2014). Audretsch et al. (2019) distinguish economic, technological and societal impacts of entrepreneurial ecosystems. Economic impacts refer to economic benefits of regional agglomeration of local factors and resources and their entrepreneurial exploitation as well as the associated spillover effects. Technological impacts relate to the efficient transformation of ideas and inventions to innovative products and services. Societal impacts entail both monetary and non-monetary outcomes through which social benefits spill over into the delivery of new products and services that are beneficial for society, and any additional positive externalities that are created through entrepreneurial ecosystems. Audretsch et al. (2019) also emphasise that economic and technological dimensions of entrepreneurial ecosystems are primarily concerned with the value creation, whereas the societal dimension is concerned about the value distribution, but it also contributes to the value creation. However, the societal dimensions and impact of entrepreneurial ecosystems tend to be undervalued and under-researched.

There is no standardised strategy for effectively developing entrepreneurial ecosystems (Audretsch, 2015). Although entrepreneurial ecosystems are conceptualised on the basis of 'best practice' examples observed in a few core economic regions and capital cities, it is obvious that most ecosystems fail to achieve ideal conditions. To provide a preliminary solution to these issues, without developing a fully-fledged taxonomy, Brown and Mason (2017) outline a basic dichotomous framework comprising two diametrically opposed 'ideal types' - 'embryonic ecosystems' and 'scale-up ecosystems'. Underdeveloped or embryonic ecosystems, which are characterised by a relatively modest level of entrepreneurial orientation and growth-oriented

[38] An alternative view is advocated by Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (2000). They view the entrepreneurial university, which has a proactive role in producing, sharing and utilising new knowledge, as cornerstone of triple-helix collaboration.

entrepreneurship, are the most common type. Embryonic ecosystems are characterised by the dominance of established firms and create a limited number of start-ups and high-growth firms. Interactions within them are limited, especially when it comes to serial entrepreneurs, business angels and dealmakers. Available funding is driven by the needs of start-ups, usually with good sources of seed and early-stage funding, which often partly comes from public sources. Entrepreneurship is mostly locally focused, with some linkages to (inter)national organisations in order to obtain funding, R&D services or human capital. Policy actors play an important role, in particular in increasing funding to new technology-based firms. Furthermore, Cao and Shi (2020) identify three groups of elements widespread in emerging economies, which challenge the direct transfer of the models based on advanced entrepreneurial ecosystems. First, there is a scarcity of available resources, including human and financial resources, knowledge and physical infrastructure. Second, there are structural gaps in entrepreneurial ecosystems such as the absence of particular actors, networks and collaboration practices. Third, there are also institutional voids related to both formal and informal institutions. Consequently, developing entrepreneurial ecosystems in such conditions is a challenging task that needs to take into account the specificities of particular countries and sectors.

When it comes to social enterprise ecosystems, the situation becomes even more complex. On the one hand, social enterprises are burdened with similar risks and costs as other enterprises. Although innovativeness and proactiveness and many entrepreneurial processes are similar, the autonomy, competitive aggressiveness, and risk-taking of social enterprises are somewhat constrained by the presence of multiple stakeholders and limited access to resources/funding (Lumpkin et al., 2011). Although social enterprises aim to develop and scale-up their activities and resources, neither their strategies nor public policies typically focus on the creation of high-growth or ‘blockbuster’ enterprises in the conventional sense. Social enterprises are closely linked with social innovations; addressing opportunities for social change through entrepreneurial activity rather than through public policy or civil society organisations is innovative by itself in many social contexts. Rather than deriving from business models as it does in the United States, social entrepreneurship in Europe is mostly rooted in collective action; it is a collective entrepreneurial model based on the values of solidarity, self-help, participation, and

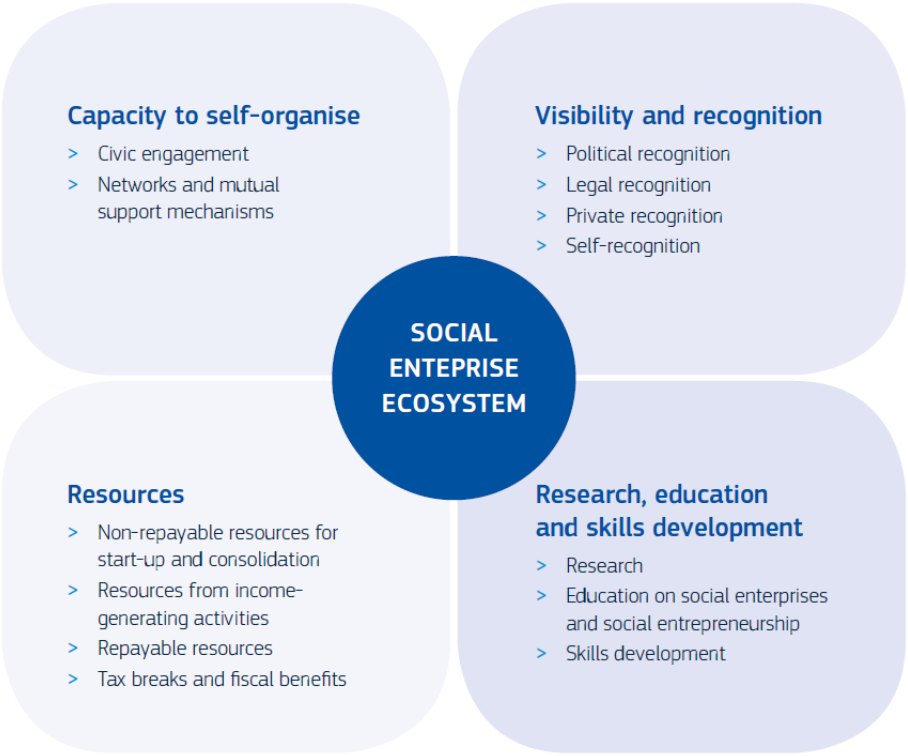
inclusive and sustainable growth (EC, 2020). All these factors contribute to the complexity of the interplay between social enterprises and their environments.

EC (2020) provides an analysis of social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Hereby the ecosystem concept is defined in a relatively basic manner and without explicit references to the literature on entrepreneurial ecosystems. The term "…is used to describe the environment within which social enterprises operate. It reflects the fact that social enterprises evolve with and develop relationships with their beneficiaries, lead producers, suppliers, stakeholders, governments, and even competitors" (EC, 2020: 162). In other works, an ecosystem is mainly understood as a stakeholder network in which social enterprises emerge, develop and operate while being largely dependent on it. Since the document is based on inputs from specific countries, there is an implicit focus on the national level, at which relevant policies are adopted, with some attention also being devoted to the local and EU levels.

The following figure identifies the four pillars of such ecosystems:

- citizens' ability to self-organise, which facilitates the emergence and development of social enterprises;
- visibility and recognition of social enterprises by policymakers (including legal recognition), private actors (e.g. private marks) and willingness of social enterprises to declare as such and self-organise;
- access to resources, including finance (grants, vouchers, investments, loans), tax breaks and fiscal benefits and capacity to generate income;
- research, education and skills development activities.

Figure 2. Social enterprise ecosystem



Source: EC (2020)

The identified social enterprise ecosystem pillars broadly correspond to the elements of Isenberg's (2011) framework outlined above (please also see below). However, it is obvious that the model proposed by EC (2020) clearly refers to the initial stage of ecosystem development, in which enterprises still seek basic visibility, recognition and access to financial and knowledge resources, rather than a functional conducive environment in which they can thrive. In comparison to the 'embryonic' stage of development of many entrepreneurial ecosystems, we might call these social enterprise ecosystems 'proto-embryonic', as they often lack even basic prerequisites for enterprise development.

Stakeholder networks in social enterprise ecosystems

As outlined above, the notion of a social enterprise ecosystem in the EU still seems underspecified and it would benefit from a more explicit acknowledgement of academic literature on entrepreneurial ecosystems and stakeholder management, which should be adapted to the specific characteristics of social entrepreneurship. A deeper understanding of

social enterprise ecosystems would also contribute to the formulation of policies that would facilitate their effectiveness. In this paper, we are developing such a framework based on a revised Isenberg's (2011) model of ecosystems that includes social enterprise pillars from EC (2020) and translates these elements into specific stakeholder relationships faced by social enterprises. Social enterprise ecosystem domains, which are taken from Isenberg (2011), are divided into two subdomains, which revolve around specific resources and involve specific stakeholders of social enterprises. The revised framework is presented in the following table:

Table 1. Social enterprise ecosystems and their key stakeholders

Domain	Subdomain	Resource	Stakeholders	Level
Culture	**Storytelling**	▪ Legitimacy and support ▪ Participation	▪ Citizens ▪ Media ▪ Prospective social entrepreneurs	▪ Local ▪ National
	Societal norms	▪ Legitimacy and support ▪ Participation	▪ Citizens ▪ Media ▪ Prospective social entrepreneurs	▪ Local ▪ National
Policy	**Government**	▪ Legal recognition ▪ Policy scope ▪ Institutional support	▪ Ministries / agencies ▪ Advocacy organisations	▪ National ▪ EU
	Leadership and advocacy	▪ Policy innovations ▪ New knowledge	▪ Ministries / agencies ▪ Research organisations ▪ Advocacy organisations ▪ Citizens	▪ National ▪ EU
Human capital	**Labour**	▪ Skilled labour ▪ Mentorship	▪ Founders ▪ Employees	▪ Local ▪ Regional
	Education	▪ Education and training	▪ Educational institutions	▪ Local ▪ Regional
Finance	**Grants and investments**	▪ Co-investment	▪ Ministries / agencies ▪ Public sector companies ▪ Local authorities ▪ Social impact investors	▪ Local ▪ National ▪ EU
	Tax breaks and fiscal benefits	▪ Reduction of taxes ▪ Reduction of social security obligations	▪ Tax authorities	▪ National
Supports	**Support organisations**	▪ Education and training ▪ Visibility ▪ Partnerships	▪ Support organisations (e.g. hubs) ▪ Other social enterprises	▪ Local ▪ Regional

	Support professions	▪ Mentorship ▪ Professional services	▪ Providers of mentorship and professional services	▪ Local ▪ Regional
Markets	**Customers and users**	▪ Income	▪ Citizens ▪ Public sector ▪ Corporations (e.g. CSR)	▪ Local ▪ National
	Networks and organisations	▪ Visibility ▪ Partnerships ▪ Income from projects ▪ Branding	▪ Other social enterprises ▪ Other organisations with a similar mission (NGOs) ▪ Certification providers	▪ Local ▪ National ▪ EU

Source: Adapted from Isenberg (2011) and EC (2020)

The domain of culture starts with storytelling, which entails sharing social entrepreneurship stories of successes and failures, difficulties, innovative approaches to social problems, etc. It is best that the stories are rooted in or related to the experiences of the target audience (i.e. that they come from similar contexts), which may be reached through direct contact or through the media, including social networks. Moreover, culture also entails and affects societal norms and values which may motivate or constrain social entrepreneurship, e.g. by demonstrating the viability and attractiveness of social entrepreneurship as a collective effort to promote social change and innovation which has both similarities to and differences from civic engagement and business entrepreneurship.

The policy domain largely revolves around the activities of the national government, but also includes the EU, as well as national and international advocacy organisations that aim to influence relevant policies. The key resources in this area are legal recognition of social enterprises, the scope of relevant policies, available financial resources and institutional support provided to social enterprises by government bodies or other organisations (cf. Račić, 2022). The policy domain also encompasses leadership and advocacy, i.e. production of new knowledge, pilot projects and policy innovations that can steer, strengthen and enlarge policies that support social entrepreneurship. However, leadership development and advocacy efforts are more likely to flourish when there is at least minimal policy support for social entrepreneurship, with responsible bodies to which advocacy efforts can be addressed.

Another crucial dimension of the social enterprise ecosystems is human capital, which entails the availability of skilled labour, which can act as founders, mentors or employees of social

enterprises, and availability and access to education and training that can increase the capacities and interest of participants to engage in social entrepreneurship. The processes of skills anticipation, development and deployment largely operate at local and regional levels. The lack of recognition of social entrepreneurship as a legitimate societal domain may constrain the development of human capital through education and training which cannot be adequately compensated by informal and non-formal learning.

It is widely recognised that social enterprises deserve support in the form of financial and tax incentives for their activities, due to both the social impact they aim to create and to the specific difficulties they encounter. However, the extent of these incentives is a direct consequence of the relevant policies and funding programmes at national and EU levels; local or regional authorities may also provide a contribution. Grants and investments available to social enterprises can be allocated and/or disbursed by ministries, agencies and public sector companies, which usually provide grants or soft loans, as well as by social impact investors that seek environmental, social and/or financial returns. Furthermore, social enterprises may be entitled to reduced taxes and/or social security obligations.

The supports domain encompasses support organisations that complement the resources and competencies of social enterprises and promote their interests in society, usually by providing education and training, visibility and partnerships. Availability of support is a key prerequisite of an effective entrepreneurial ecosystem, as it enables access to resources that otherwise may not be available. Therefore, the supports domain is usually interlinked with one or more other ecosystem domains. Support may be related to capacity building (related to the human capital domain), market access and branding (related to the domain of the market) and/or projects funded by public authorities (related to policy and finance). A facilitating role is played by support professions, which provide mentorship and professional services needed for the business development of social enterprises.

Finally, the social enterprise ecosystems also include markets. On the one hand, there are different groups of customers and users, from which income is generated directly or indirectly. These may include citizens, public sector organisations (which may procure some services from enterprises or act as intermediaries) and corporations, with which social enterprises may

generate new business models or participate in their corporate social responsibility initiatives, usually related to community development or environmental activities. However, many social enterprises are currently unable to generate sufficient income from these streams. The markets in which social enterprises operate tend to be underdeveloped. Due to weak incentives, insufficient knowledge and finance, behavioural inertia, technology risk and other factors, final beneficiaries are often unable or reluctant to use the products and services offered by social enterprises. Consequently, a crucial role in viability of many social enterprises in Europe is played by networks and organisations that formally or informally link similar or complementary social enterprises and their partners from other sectors (NGOs, universities, public sector organisations such as development agencies etc.) but operating in the same domain (e.g. renewable energy), which enable not only better visibility and branding of social enterprises but also turn these partnerships into projects, often financed by the EU. Such projects provide more stable income streams than 'pure' market activities.

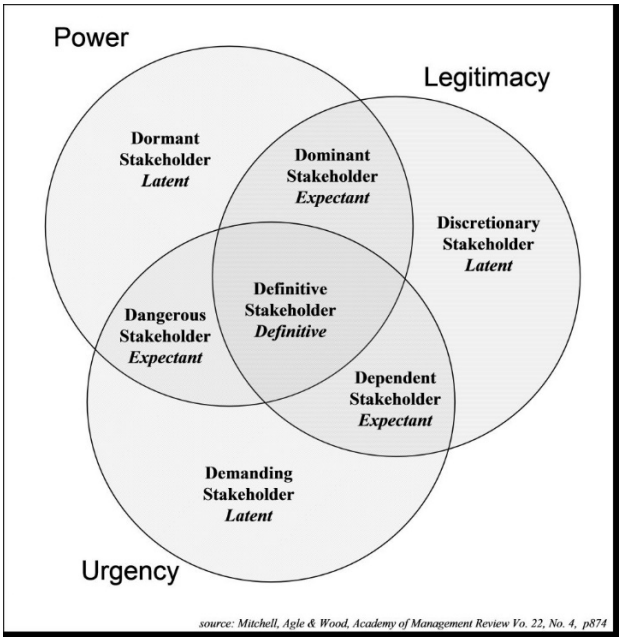
Each ecosystem (sub)domain is populated by specific sets of stakeholders. Specific stakeholder relationships are formed and operate at local, national and/or international (EU) levels, as it can be observed in Table 1. Stakeholder relationships in social enterprise ecosystems are diverse and numerous but often weak. Consequently, ecosystems populated by such stakeholders are currently usually proto-embryonic. Social enterprise operating in such environments still tackle rather basic issues such as societal legitimacy, legal recognition and market presence, receive little institutional support and to a significant extent depend on non-market sources of finance, usually in the form of project grants and favourable tax treatment.

Freeman's (1984: 46) original definition of the stakeholder in an organization as 'any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives' has retained its pertinence, but it has provided limited guidance to the relative priority of claims of different stakeholders. To address that issue, Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997: 854) developed a theory of stakeholder salience as 'the degree to which managers give priority to competing stakeholder claims'. This normative theory of stakeholder identification and salience is based on three variables: power to influence the firm, legitimacy of the stakeholders' relationships with the firm and the urgency of the stakeholders' claim on the firm. Based on Etzioni (1964), power

is defined as the extent to which a party has or can gain access to coercive (physical means), utilitarian (material means) or normative (prestige, esteem and social) means to impose their will. Based on Suchman (1995: 57), legitimacy is defined as 'a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions'. The definition of urgency is contributed by the authors themselves, as the degree to which stakeholder claims require immediate attention. Urgency is related both to time-sensitivity and to the critical nature of the relationship with the stakeholder and the characteristics of their claim (Mitchell, Agle and Wood, 1997). Definitive stakeholders are an 'ideal type'; their claims demonstrate power, legitimacy and urgency at the same time. Lower level of salience is exhibited by expectant stakeholders, whose claims are characterised by power and legitimacy (dominant stakeholders), power and urgency (dangerous stakeholders) or legitimacy and urgency (dependent stakeholders). Latent stakeholders' claims exhibit only one dimension – power (dormant stakeholders), legitimacy (discretionary stakeholders) or urgency (demanding stakeholders).

The typology of stakeholders based on the theory of stakeholder salience is given below.

Figure 3. Stakeholder salience



Source: Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997)

The stakeholder salience framework is applicable to any organisation, i.e. to its stakeholder relationships and stakeholder networks in which it is embedded. However, it is argued here that such a framework is particularly suitable for social enterprises, given the importance of stakeholder networks in the governance of social enterprises, access to resources and markets, procurement and generating local support for the enterprise (cf. Shaw and Carter, 2007; EC, 2020). Value creation and distribution in/by social enterprises is inherently bound to their embeddedness in stakeholder networks, which therefore need to be analysed and managed. Consequently, this paper applies the aforementioned framework in the context of social entrepreneurship and ecosystems in which social enterprises operate.

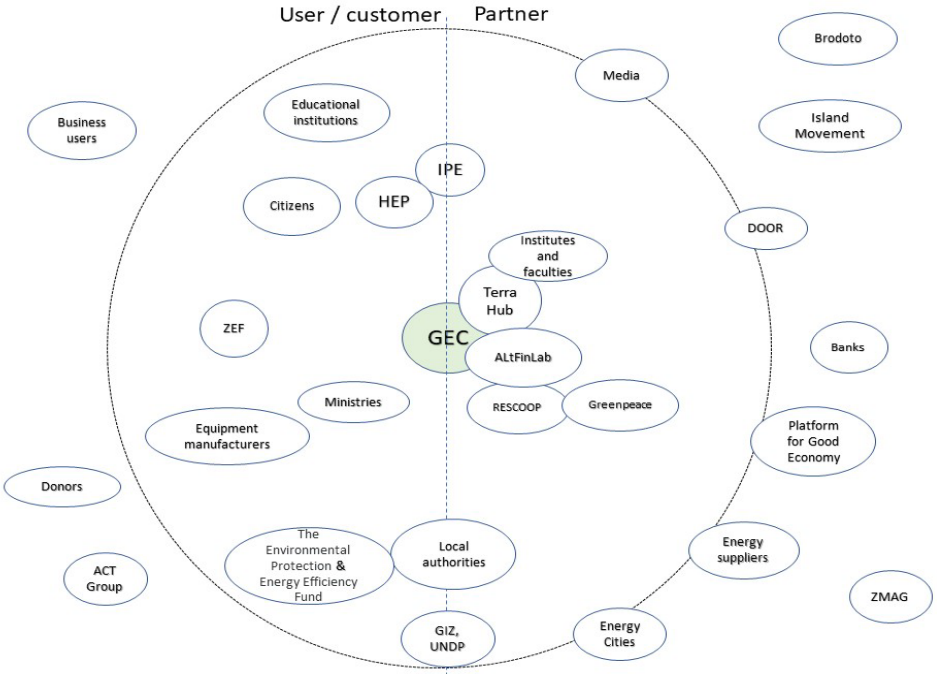
Case study: Green Energy Cooperative in Croatia

The framework is applied to the case study of the Green Energy Cooperative (GEC) from Croatia (in Croatian: Zelena energetska zadruga (ZEZ)). GEC is a social enterprise that was founded in 2013 by a group of experts and activists who aimed to facilitate local communities in planning, development, management and financing of renewable energy sources and energy efficiency projects. The current focus is on solar energy projects owned by citizens and communities. Many of the founding members gathered experience by working for or with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Over time, GEC has grown into one of the most successful social enterprises in Croatia with about 20 employees (who are often but not necessarily members of the cooperative), a wide range of successful projects across Croatia, including spinoff projects in local communities which continue to operate independently. Given the underdevelopment of the relevant ecosystem in Croatia, fulfilling the 'localised' mission of promoting behavioural change and energy transition also simultaneously required strategic engagement of GEC with policymakers at the national level, as well as with EU and other international funding sources and advocacy organisations. Each of these territorial dimensions (related to local projects, national policies and international funding and advocacy) involves relationships with multiple stakeholders which need to be developed and maintained over time, if viability and impact are to be achieved.

The case study is developed in two steps. First, GEC stakeholder maps from 2018 and 2023 are presented in Figures 4 and 5, respectively, which also indicate the evolution of the GEC stakeholder network over a five-year period[39]. Consequently, main stakeholders are grouped in accordance with the framework from Table 1 and additionally analysed.

In the maps below, stakeholders are grouped into users/customers, which are positioned on the left-hand side, and partners, which are placed on the right-hand side of the network. GEC is positioned in the centre, so the distance from it indicates the salience of a particular stakeholder to the cooperative.

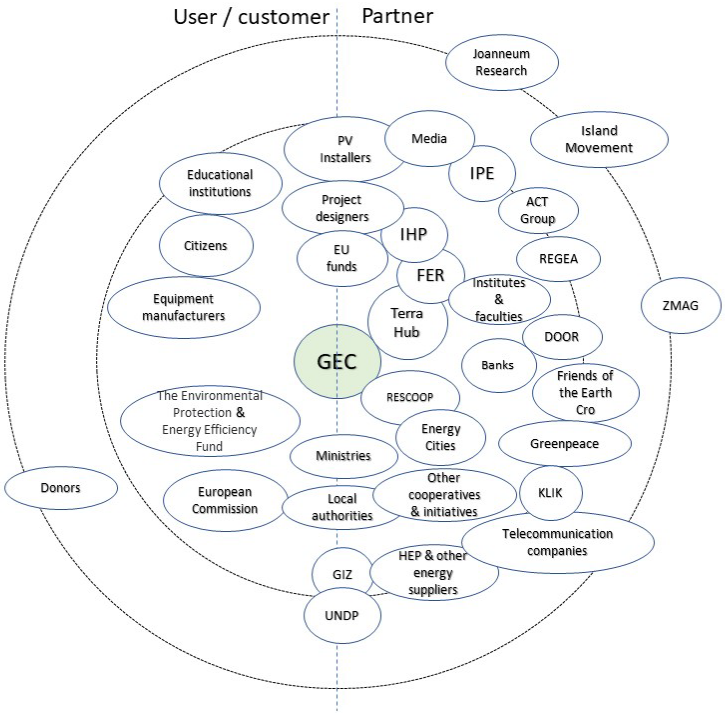
Figure 4. Green Energy Cooperative stakeholder network, 2018



Source: Green Energy Cooperative

Figure 5. Green Energy Cooperative stakeholder network, 2023

[39] Figure 4 provides the stakeholder map made by the GEC team in a strategic meeting in 2018. Figure 5 provides an updated map developed in semi-structured interviews with GEC board members Zoran Kordić (cooperative manager) and Sandra Vlašić (partnerships coordinator).



Source: Green Energy Cooperative

The next step in the analysis is categorising the main stakeholders into groups defined above. The results are presented below.

Table 2. Key stakeholders of the Green Energy Cooperative

Domain	Subdomain	Key stakeholders	Salience	Level
Culture	**Storytelling**	▪ TerraHub (NGO) ▪ Media	▪ Dominant ▪ Discretionary	▪ Local ▪ National
	Societal norms	▪ Institute for Political Ecology / IPE (NGO) ▪ Friends of the Earth Croatia (NGO ▪ KLIK (Coop)	▪ Definitive ▪ Dominant ▪ Discretionary	▪ Local ▪ National
Policy	**Government**	▪ Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development	▪ Dominant	▪ National
	Leadership and advocacy	▪ RESCoop ▪ Greenpeace	▪ Definitive ▪ Discretionary	▪ EU ▪ National
Human capital	**Labour**	▪ Cooperative members ▪ Employees ▪ PV installers ▪ Project designers	▪ Definitive	▪ Local
	Education	▪ Educational institutions	▪ Discretionary	▪ Local

				▪ Regional
Finance	**Grants and investments**	▪ European Commission (Horizon 2020, Horizon Europe, LIFE)	▪ Discretionary	▪ EU
	Tax breaks and fiscal benefits	▪ Tax authorities	▪ Dormant	▪ National
Supports	**Support organisations**	▪ Research institutions (FER, IHP, Joanneum) ▪ Banks	▪ Discretionary ▪ Dominant	▪ Local / EU ▪ National
	Support professions	▪ Researchers ▪ Journalists	▪ Discretionary ▪ Dependent	▪ Local ▪ National
Markets	**Customers and users**	▪ Cities and communities ▪ Citizens ▪ HEP ▪ Environmental Protection and Energy Efficiency Fund	▪ Definitive	▪ Local ▪ National
	Networks and organisations	▪ Project partners in EU-funded projects ▪ RESCoop & other coops ▪ International organisations (UNDP, GIZ, ECF, Energy Cities) ▪ REGEA (energy agency)	▪ Definitive ▪ Definitive ▪ Dominant	▪ Local/EU ▪ EU ▪ Local

Source: Authors' analysis based on inputs provided by GEC

Green Energy Cooperative is embedded in a multiplicity of stakeholder relationships with different levels and types of salience. The stakeholder network grows and becomes more diversified over time, which also indicates a diversification of activities, relationships and resources that are being developed and/or exchanged in these relationships. In order to manage its relationships within the stakeholder network, GEC needs to invest increased efforts and build internal organisation with more specialised roles. As the stakeholder network becomes more diversified, the heterogeneity of relationships with particular partners also increases, with some of them becoming more salient and strategically important. Moreover, increased relationship density may also indicate a more developed social enterprise ecosystem in Croatia, but such a claim should be verified and supported by additional research.

Despite the important (and increasing) role of different types of customers and users as definitive stakeholders, which have power, legitimacy and urgency, the business model employed by the GEC is currently insufficient to generate income which would enable continuation and long-term

viability of the organisation. Therefore, GEC still relies on donor-funded projects, such as those funded by the European Commission through the Horizon 2020 or LIFE programmes. Such projects are undertaken in consortia with partners from Croatia and other European countries, which makes relationships with these partners crucial for the organisation. The projects encompass a wide range of activities which develop, pilot and utilize new technological and social innovations in the fields of renewable (solar) energy and energy efficiency, including analysis, development of tools, methodologies and know-how, pilot and demonstration activities, policy recommendations, networking, events, alternative modes of financing etc. These activities help develop the relevant markets but are rarely followed-up by reaping of the plentiful social and economic benefits by GEC. In other words, GEC is still unable to move on from 'projectification' of its activities towards more market-driven approach based on the outputs and outcomes of the undertaken projects. Moreover, continued projectification turns current and prospective project partners into definitive stakeholders, whose power, legitimacy and urgency may lead to lock-in effects with long-term consequences for the strategy of the organisation. At the same time, its main donors such as the European Commission are examples of passive (discretionary) stakeholders which possess legitimacy but neither power nor urgency.

When analysing the territorial dimension of the stakeholder map, there is an increasing number of salient local stakeholders, with an accent on customers and users, supports and culture domains. Many of them are definitive stakeholders, which have power, legitimacy and urgency, so GEC invest considerable efforts to engage them in projects and policy initiatives and develop mutual commitment. Local partnerships are important to GEC for piloting and confirming best practices in a real-life environment, as well as for the overall promotion and visibility of GEC as a key actor in the area of solar energy owned by citizens and communities. Furthermore, local academic institutions are partners in technological and social innovations implemented by GEC in its projects. The national level of stakeholder relationships is important for legislation and setting standards and investment priorities in the energy sector; the government is a dominant stakeholder, whereas the national energy company (HEP), as a market leader, is a definitive stakeholder. Market development in solar energy also makes banks increasingly important as support institutions that can provide funding, but there are only few examples of such projects.

The primary resource obtained by GEC at the EU/international level is funding. However, policy perspective, advocacy, visibility for future partnerships and opportunities for replication and scaling-up of specific activities are also important – and they are achieved through multiple partners within the networks and organisations domain.

The key domain for the future development of GEC and the ecosystem in which it is embedded is markets – both in terms of customers/users and networks/organisations. The relationship between GEC and the market is complex. First, there is still an internal strategic dilemma within GEC between its 'social' and 'enterprise' dimensions, i.e. to what extent its activities should be funded externally and free to final beneficiaries (e.g. citizens) and which (if any) services should be charged. This dilemma is reflected in internal resource allocations and relatively weak internal capacities to focus on market-based activities. Moreover, social innovation, upon which GEC market activities are often based, needs to be rooted in local environment, which is a major constraint when the market is still in the early stages of development. In such conditions, partners and competitors may sometimes be difficult to differentiate. For example, different public and private entities in Croatia may provide nominal support to the GEC activities which promote solar energy projects owned by citizens, but, when it comes to capturing market opportunities in that area, they will seek to capture the benefits themselves. Monetisation of market-building activities is difficult, as there are few public tenders for the services GEC offers. Moreover, many intermediate (e.g. PV installers and project designers) as well as final beneficiaries (e.g. citizens and local communities) expect to receive those services for free. When it comes to networks and organisations, there are opportunities in developing stronger partnerships. On-demand relationships with partners driven by project implementation concerns often prevail where there should be more coordination and, exchange of information, experiences, and data. Project-related communication could thus be utilised to develop more strategic relationships with selected partners. Furthermore, the focus on project implementation and the lack of articulated and effectively communicated demands and proposals in the public domain do not result in adequate visibility and public recognition of GEC. That is also in part due to the underdeveloped (pre-embryonic) ecosystem, which leaves social enterprises in a bubble of their own and makes them recognized within it, but not so much beyond it.

According to the interviewed GEC board members[40], the social legitimacy of the cooperative is improving. Positive trends occur despite the lack of legal recognition of social entrepreneurship as a specific form of entrepreneurship which deserves a targeted policy approach. The diversity of possible legal and organisational forms of social enterprises leads to their invisibility in the field of public policies, with very few support measures (Račić, 2022)[41]. Social entrepreneurship seems still associated with NGOs, rather than with reaching social objectives through entrepreneurship. Given such unfavourable conditions, GEC board members emphasise the need for GEC to build stronger internal capacities to position itself on the market and utilise its potential. On the other hand, project-based financing will also be needed in the foreseeable future. Consequently, GEC recently formally changed its legal status to a non-profit cooperative (although it has effectively acted as a non-profit enterprise since its foundation), thus widening its access to funding programmes which provide support to non-profit entities.

Concluding remarks

Social enterprises evolve in entrepreneurial ecosystems which tend to be even less developed than in the case of profit-oriented entrepreneurship; inspired by Brown and Mason (2017), we call them proto-embryonic. Hereby an ecosystem can be viewed as a stakeholder network in which social enterprises emerge, develop and operate and in which they obtain relevant resources. Given unfavourable conditions in many local and national ecosystems, many successful social enterprises broaden their horizon in terms of stakeholder networks in which they participate. That leads to the multi-territorial nature of stakeholder networks in which social enterprises are embedded, whereby weaknesses at one territorial level are overcome by utilising opportunities at other levels. These developments have been analysed by a revision and adaptation of Isenberg's (2011) model of ecosystems to fit social enterprises, their stakeholder networks and the resources exchanged within these networks. That model has been

[40] Semi-structured interviews with GEC board members Zoran Kordić (cooperative manager) and Sandra Vlašić (partnerships coordinator) were conducted in February and March 2023.

[41] Despite the adoption of the Strategy for the Development of Social Entrepreneurship in the Republic of Croatia for the period from 2015 to 2020, minimal progress has been made in the support and development of this sector. Social enterprises are still not legally recognised as such. They do they enjoy institutional support and occasional financial support depends on the European Social Fund (cf. Račić, 2022).

complemented by Mitchell, Agle and Wood's (1997) analysis of stakeholder salience which provides insights into the relative weight of particular stakeholder claims. The conceptual framework has subsequently been applied to the case study of the Green Energy Cooperative, as a social enterprise with diverse capabilities and stakeholder relationships, which nevertheless exemplifies the difficulties of shifting from project-based financing (i.e. grants) towards a market-driven approach.

This dual nature of GEC, based on simultaneous implementation of project-funded and market-driven activities, can be viewed both as an 'insurance policy' which reduces risks during downturns and as a strategic challenge to the coherence of the organisation. However, unless social enterprise ecosystem gaps in Croatia are addressed through effective public policies, dense stakeholder networks and emergence of new social enterprises, such a dual strategy is a reasonable response to the uncertainties of an underdeveloped ecosystem.

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Beginnings of cooperatives on the island of Hvar- maintaining the identity of the collective in the village of Velo Grablje

Veronika Gamulin

Independent Researcher

Introduction

The beginnings of cooperatives in Dalmatia

In the region of Dalmatia There is a long tradition of gathering on the basis of solidarity for the purpose of helping each other, by the church brotherhoods, present in this area from the Middle Ages. The best-known example of a pre-cooperative community in Dalmatia operated in the area of Blaca Hermitage on the island of Brač in the 16th century, where Glagolitic priests built a monastery and farm buildings and eventually formed an agricultural cooperative. From the very beginning, cooperative gatherings were guided by the ideals of equality, reciprocity, morality, social security and joint decision-making, and were also open to secular people.

In the 19th century, Dalmatia was part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the poorest and most agrarian province in the great Empire. The Dalmatian industry back then was almost not present so the local communities mainly consisted of self-employed farmers and fishermen. Wine, olive oil and salted fish production were the most important economic activities for the islanders.

Most farmers didn't own much land. The main problems of the Dalmatian field, in general, were the fragmentation of the land, land ownership relations, difficult and steep rocky terrain, and the lack of field roads and water. Farmers worked hard but mostly on the landholder's land in exchange for a share. Most of the time, they were just surviving. Their economic position was extremely difficult without the possibility of obtaining loans, which mostly left them to the so-called loan sharks.

During the booming of the wine trade, the region of Dalmatia exported more than 600.000 hectolitres of wine, so it's not exaggerating to say that the whole of Dalmatia was one huge vineyard. This was the result of the high demand for Dalmatian wines in the secon half of the 19th century when phylloxera[42] began to destroy French and Italian vineyards. To be able to sell as much wine as possible, the Dalmatian farmers cut down centuries-old olive groves to plant grapevine that eventually became a monoculture (Gizdić:2004:24). Finally, the grape pandemic phylloxera came to Dalmatia by the end of the 19th century and eventually destroyed most of Dalmatian vineyards. In addition to this catastrophe, the Austrian Hungarian government in 1892 banned the export of Dalmatian wines (wine clause). A great number of islanders were forced to emigrate to overseas countries.

At the end of the 19th century, cooperative movements became extremely important generators for rural communities in Dalmatian towns and villages, as forms of mini-businesses. With their solidarity nature of the fairer placement of agrarian domestic products, cooperatives enable not only the existence but also the cultural and social development of these mostly poor rural areas of the former Austro-Hungarian periphery. At that time, more than 1,500 cooperatives with about 250,000 cooperative members were active in today's Croatia.

The first cooperative in Dalmatia was founded in Korčula in 1864, under the name Mutual Credit Treasury (Blagajna uzajamne vjeresije), basically a Credit Union that enabled farmers to get loans but also encourage them to save money. This cooperative was founded only twenty years after the founding of the Rochdale Fair Pioneer Society, the first cooperative of modern cooperative organization. The main goal of the cooperative was written in its statute: "The purpose of the association is to meet the needs for money among the classes, namely artisans, merchants, landlords and farmers, and to help them through mediation in obtaining mutual loans, and to promote savings among members, which is no less important than granting loans." (Martinović

[42] Phylloxera is a grapevine's root disease which has destroyed unvaccinated vines. It first appeared in Europe in 1863 in England, in 1867 in Southern France, in 1880 in Croatia, in 1894 in Dalmatia

2022:3) In addition to loans and savings Credit union also procured seeds, mineral fertilizers and other materials for framers (Mataga:2005:21).

The village of Velo Grablje

The village of Velo Grablje is located at 350 m above sea level on steep slopes in a valley on the southern side of the island of Hvar, surrounded by incredibly well-preserved grids of drystone walls and breathtaking landscape. The charming village seems as if it remained frozen in the 19th century, with an incredible view towards the island of Vis and the open sea. Modern architectural interventions of the infamous "apartmanization"[43] , are rare and mostly do not disturb the harmonious idyll of the utopian vision of the landscape. Today, about fifteen inhabitants live in the village.

The area of Velo Grablje has been inhabited since prehistoric times, and during antiquity and the Middle Ages it was located on the municipal road (via communis) from Stari Grad (Faros i.e. Pharia) to the town of Hvar, which indicates the millennial vitality of this area. Due to its natural and cultural values, the village of Velo Grablje is today under preventive conservation protection, and since 2005 it has been part of the Ethno-Eco Village program.

The village developed around shepherds' dwellings, which were used for seasonal work with the livestock. In addition to animal husbandry, the first inhabitants of this area engaged in hunting and agriculture for their own needs.

Apart from the main village Velo Grablje[44] (meaning „Greater Grablje") separated villages were developed over time, Malo Grablje (Lower Grablje) in the basin on the southern side of the island, and Selca, on the northern side towards Stari Grad. The very name of the settlement Grablje

[43] "apartmanization" refers to a recent trend in new housing development suited for rent during the summer season, within a coastal region in Croatia, which has increased in the last 25 years
[44] Velo Grablje was once known as Gornje Grablje (Upper Grablje)

(Velo is derived from the collective noun of the hornbeam tree (in Croatian: grab) that was once spread over the entire island of Hvar.

Most of the land in the Grablje area was communal, and mass cultivation of the landscape began with the giving of the so-called Gratia (gratia) to landowners and peasants who in return were obliged to give part of the income to the municipality (Petrić 2008:8).

The curiosity of the Dalmatian landscape is primarily in the traditional way of cultivating the sparse karst terrain. In the Grablje area, this mosaic relief with a geometric grid of drywall is well preserved and bears witness to the painstaking efforts of the former inhabitants of this area. Namely, the wild rugged terrain, mostly hilly and inaccessible, had to be almost entirely cut down and cultivated for planting purposes. The islanders broke and ground stones and used them to build stone walls, between which they then poured fertile soil. Most of these jobs were done manually by heavy workers. These fenced plots, for planting vines, olives, figs, lavender or other crops, have always been a prerequisite for survival for numerous generations of islanders.

In addition to testifying to the influence of people in the formation of the island landscape, today's drystone walling („Gomile“ in Croatian) are one of the determinants of the collective identification of island communities. Since 2108 the art of dry-stone walling was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by Unesco.[45]

The collective memory of the hard physical work of their ancestors represented by dry stone walls is in contradiction with today's easy way of life of the majority of the islanders who live off the tourism industry. It is often heard in local narratives between older and younger generations of islanders that it is their ancestors who are responsible for the current well-being of the younger

[45] Besides Croatia the art of drystone walling is practised in Cyprus , Spain, France, Greece, Italy, Slovenia and Switzerland

generations to whom "everything was served without much effort", i.e. how they became owners of the land without any hard work“. [46]

Although the settlement was formed in the 15th century, it seems that its inhabitants, shepherds and farmers, made economic progress very quickly. In the 18th century, Grablje gradually became independent as a village and parish in relation to the town of Hvar. The 19th century, like most other Dalmatian islands, was affected by waves of emigration due to extremely difficult economic and political island environment. The people of Grablje emigrate mainly to California, Chile, Argentina and Bolivia.

In the second half of the 19th century, the remaining Grablje farmers survived primarily because of the good production and sale of wine and Dalmatian insect-flower „Buhač“. After phylloxera finally ravaged most Hvar vineyards[47], „Buhač“ remained the only crop that was massively planted and processed. „Buhač“ (Tanacetum cinerariifolium Trevis.) is an endemic plant that contains pyrethrin, the first natural insecticide that has been used to control pests in households and agriculture. „Buhač“ fields were harvested in June, then dried and ground into powder and exported all over the world in large quantities. The boom in „Buhač „lasted from the 1870s until the 1920s, when Japan took over the market with more competitive prices and superior processing. With the invention of more effective and cheaper synthetic insecticide DDT in 1940s the consumption of “Buhač” was eventually reduced all over the world.

Gratitude for „Buhač“ can be seen in the interesting inscription on the chimney of the Bartuč family's house in Malo Grablje, "God and Buhač helped 1888", as well as on the frescoes in the interior of the church of St. Kuzma and Damjan in Velo Grablje with a depiction of the plague with

[46] For example, in the statements of some islanders of the older generation: "Your ancestors broke their backs to build houses so that you can laze around today..." Or "…They (young people) don't even know how to hold a hoe, let alone how to milk a goat. Well... they don't even know what a goat and a donkey look like... They just look at what they will inherit and how they will build apartments..."

[47] According to Kuzma Petrić phylloxera hit Velo Grablje around 1914

St. Mary. Moreover, in the very foundations of the church, next to the memorial charter, they placed 10 guilders[48] and ten flowers of „buhač". The village reached a demographic maximum of 532 inhabitants in 1881.

First Rosemary Cooperative in Dalmatia

In addition to the traditional cultivation of mainly vines and olives, the inhabitants of Velo Grablje have a long tradition of processing aromatic herbs. The islanders have been collecting and growing medicinal aromatic herbs since ancient times (Božić-Bužančić 1987:110) either for export or used in the production of medicines and cosmetics. The processing of rosemary in Velo Grablje has been present since the 16th century.

Rosemary (Rosmarinus officinalis) is a wild plant from the Mediterranean coast, widely spread along the entire Eastern Adriatic coast, especially on the islands of Hvar and Vis. In the Croatian language, it has many names like „zimorod" or „zumrod"as they call it locally on the island of Hvar. It grows like a bush from 1 to 3 meters in height, it has fragrant evergreen leaves with light blue flowers full of sweet juice, extremely popular among bees. The healing properties of rosemary were already known from ancient and medieval times for various types of diseases. In particular, this importance of medicinal properties has increased since the Middle Ages, when rosemary oil (Quintascenza di Rosmarino) began to be produced (Petrić i Štambuk 2007:2).

Back in the 19th century there were few very profitable island manufacturers specialized in producing essential oils. The most famous island product was the so-called „Queen's Water" [49]

[48] The Austro-Hungarian gulden (also by the name of florin or fori) was the official currency of Austria in the 19th century

[49] The name of Hungarian Queen's Water was probably taken from the mythical 14th century preparation, which was the first known European fragrant perfume based on the essence of rosemary, and which, according to the legend, served to rejuvenate the skin, but also to treat gout, sick bones and the like. Numerous rosemary-based cosmetic products are still produced under similar names

(Acqua della Regina d'Ungheria) produced by a certain Giuseppe Marincovich from the island of Hvar. [50]

The rosemary Cooperative in Velo Grablje was founded in 1892 to facilitate the work and increase the profits of this ancient Grablje trade. It was the first association on the island of Hvar based on cooperative basis and the first specialized COOP in Croatia. The rosemary coop was founded by a priest, Ante Petrić. In 1893. the same priest founded the Village treasury (Seoska blagajna) based on Reiffeisen principes, a kind of credit union for farmers with an unlimited gurantee to help its members. Without a skilled manager and a bookkeeper these first pioneere Cooperatives failed, but were re-established few years after.

In 1900 the Village Treasury was re-established by the local pastor Niko Gamulin from Jelsa (together with the priests Ante Petrić and Jure Tomičić, and a local teacher Bartul Žufić) who was in charge of the prosperity of the village, its cultural and economical progress. From the 1901 records of the annual assembly of the Village treasury (Seoska blagajna) in Velo Grablje, we can read the presidents explanation of the joint saving system:

"The spirit of the Village treasury is the spirit of the community, where a person should forget his household chest, and at the same time have one with his cooperates, called the Village Treasury, in which he will save money every time God provides him, and from which he will take every time he needs it[51]. The Cooperative motto was "All for one, one for all."

Under the management of Niko Gamulin, the "Village Treasury" built a cooperative building[52] in 1905, with a large konoba, two office rooms and a large hall for assemblies.

In 1902, the same priest re-established the Rosemary Cooperative. The main role of the cooperative was to gather rosemary collectors, organize and improve the distillation of rosemary

[50] „Queen's water" by Giuseppe Marincovich was produced from various fragrant essences according to a secret recipe and was used in numerous "female" diseases such as neurosis, epilepsy, migraines, dizziness, fainting, weakness, hysterical excitement, heart palpitations, stomach weakness, etc. (Božić-Bužančić: 1987:111)

[51] Records from the first annual assembly of the Village Treasury (Seoska blagajna) in Velo Grablje from 1901, The archive of Pjover Association, Velo Grablje

[52] This building is still present in the village under the name Agricultural Cooperative ("Poljoprivredna zadruga") with the year 1900 written on top, as the year when the Village Treasury was founded

oil and take care of its placement on the market. The COOP also arranged for the production and sales of other products, primarily beekeeping and honey.

The Cooperative built a a small industrial facility for the distillation of rosemary oil with very modern distillation boilers " from the German company Volkmar Hänig & Co. from Dresden, so this is considered the beginning of the modern production of essential oils on the island of Hvar and in Croatia in general. (Petrić i Štambuk 2007:14).

In 1906 the Rosemary Cooperative was presented in a Dalmation section at the big Austrain exhibition in London with other fifty exhibitors from Croatia.[53] As a sign of appreciation, the Rosemary cooperative received a special certificate from Archduke Franz Joseph for successfully participating in the London exhibition, which is still kept today in the archive of the Pjover association.

The Association Pjover and the Lavander Island

In its many epithets, the island of Hvar is called “the island of lavender”. It was in Velo Grablje that the planting of this new agricultural product began, which in many ways marked the life of many Hvar residents in the 20th century. Hvar's climate and land were ideal for growing this aromatic plant, which requires a lot of sun and light. Planting and growing lavender did not require much experience, and the fruits had to wait 3-4 years, much shorter than the fruit of the vine. Bartul Tomičić from Velo Grablje is remembered as the pioneer of planting lavender in 1928 on the island of Hvar. Lavender is a perennial evergreen plant that has blue fragrant flowers at the top of the stems. From these flowers, lavender oil is obtained by distillation, which is most often used and applied in cosmetics. Lavanda’s boom reached its peak in 1950’s.[54] It is often

[53] In the catalogue of the exhibition it is writen that Dalmatia exports a good deal of rosemary and sage oils , the most important exhibitors being Juraj Gamulin from Jelsa and Rosemary Association from Brusje and Grablje
[54] More precisely, Kuzma Petrić mentions the period from 1952-1957 and the year 1963, when islanders were able to get a good price for the lavander

mentioned among islanders that island of Hvar was responsible for 90% of entire lavender production in Yugoslavia and 10% of the world production.[55]

The cooperative is still active today in Velo Grablje under the name of the Agricultural Cooperative. One of the oldest members, Ante Tonči Petrić has been living in Velo Grablje since he was born (1957) and still remembers the activities of the cooperative from its golden days. Tonči explains how the inhabitants of Velo Grablje have always been known for their hospitality and the spirit of community:

“We, people from Grablje have always been known for our harmony and solidarity. Our church even has that inscription “God’s love and unity of the people of Grablje”… I remember as a child that everybody was somehow involved in the COOP, that is, the oldest male member of the family was a cooperative member. When the younger brother got married, i.e. start a family, he would become the new cooperative member. The lavender oil was never brought home, you had to hand over all the lavender to the cooperative's administration, who then would weigh it. During our times, everything was under control, until sometimes in the 80s. The cooperative had its own grocery store that worked until the 1980s. You could buy everything there, even underwear… Later, there were some dodgy deals…There was a guy who took a few litres of oil home for his own needs, he was then expelled from the COOP…”

Tonči notes that during Yugoslavia in the 1960s, Velo Grablje COOP fell under the umbrella of Hvar town COOP and how the changes of the mainstream politics in the state influenced the changes within the local COOP structure, but also how they managed to resist potential adversities with joint forces, as united members of the cooperative:

"I was employed in the cooperative in the town of Hvar. During the war in the 1990s, a new law on cooperatives was issued, according to which rural cooperatives could be separated from their umbrella cooperatives. During the war, it was a total collapse of the system, I didn't even receive a salary. It was immediately clear to me that the Hvar cooperative would sell our village cooperative building first. That bothered me...They’re not going to sell theirs, are they? In order

[55] Kuzma Petrić highlights exactly these results for the world production of lavender in 1966 when around 800 tons of lavender oil were produced in the world

to prevent this, I organized an initiative committee, an assembly of citizens, we all agreed and we managed to separate from the parent cooperative in Hvar, so they could not sell us. When they saw how successful we were, they did the same thing in the cooperatives in Brusje and Milna.

Even though The Agricultural Coop still operates with around 40 members, Tonči believes that the future of the lavander production is not an option for young local people today and that the spirit of togetherness has been lost because COOP members no longer meet regularly:

“We still produce some lavender oil, but it is just two weeks a year ... Today none of these young people have any interest in planting lavender... when they know that they can earn more money by caring two suitcases in the town of Hvar during the season. Once, we were all gathering…There were disagreements, but people used to meet so they would have come to an agreement. Today we are not meeting enough, that is the problem in my opinion. And that hurts me the most, because we fought to get out of the clutches of Hvar, and now again… nothing.”

Today, lavender is grown by only a few people from Velo Grablje. There were two catastrophic fires, 1n 1997 and 2003, which practically destroyed all lavander fields in Grablje region. But the main reason for the neglect of this production is a new tourism industry that has taken root on the island from 1950s today.

Due to the possibility of engaging in tourism, which began to develop massively on Hvar in the 1960s, most of the villagers moved permanently to the town of Hvar. Since the locals moved out, the lavender failed to recover and Velo Grablje was left without lavender and with only few inhabitats. The village had a permamnt population of just five until a few years ago. The situation changed when a group of young activists, originating from Velo Grablje but now living mainly in the town of Hvar, started to revive local traditions that eventually lead to the foundation of a new association called Pjover[56].

[56] The word „ Pjover” is an element of traditional island construction for collecting water, usually a wide surface that collects rainwater and let it flow into the tank

Pjover takes care of the protection and revitalization of Velo Grablje, doing a lot of efforts to popularize its local heritage, mainly to attract local people again to cultivate lavander. The association was founded in 2006 by young people In 2008, they organized the first Lavender Festival, which since then takes place every year in the month of July, when the lavender is harvested. In addition to the fair of local products, the festival consists of workshops, lectures, exhibitions, screenings of documentary films book promotion and concerts. Almost every year, the association publishes a new book on the topic of local heritage. Over time, this festival has become a kind of island institution when thousands of local and foreign visitors flock to this, otherwise almost deserted village, who want to try their hand at harvesting lavender or the process of distilling essential oil.

The initiator of the festival and the president of the Association, Ivan Zaninović Grande, founded the association in his 20s when still living in Split, with the idea of coming back to his island and reviving its homeland village. He was especially inspired by the local identity of the unity and a sense of community he remembered from his childhood. Although the initial idea of the Association was to make the village alive again by cooperative spirit, harmony and creation of better living conditions for the locals, Zaninović concludes that it is extremely difficult to maintain any kind of action on the island today when all young people are somehow involved in tourism.

At the beginning (2006) we had over hundred members of the association, today I can hardly find two or three volunteers. I “catch” these youngsters because these older ones will never come to help us. Because when they realize at the age of 18 that they can earn 500 euros per day with “pasara” (a type of boat), they will never come to help us. I was already aware at the age of 24 that this is a battle with windmills… We have succeeded a lot, but it is very difficult. There is a saying: Who has touched the Hvar square, few have ever returned. There is no more community, in life with tourism, everyone only looks out for their own interests… I'm a volunteer, it's a bit on the border of madness, the amount of work I do for Pjover. I have aged a lot in the last 16 years.

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Interviewees:

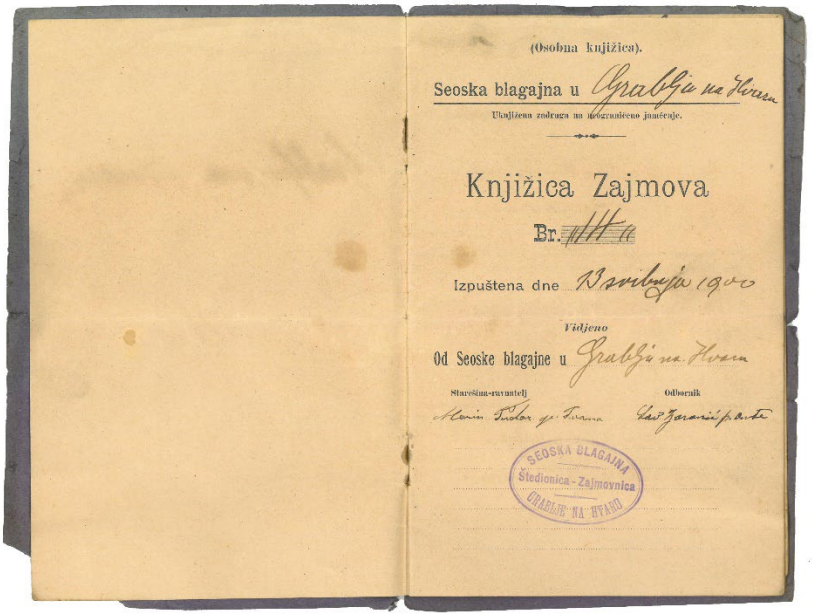
Ivo Zaninović Grande

Ante Tonči Petrić

Iskrcavanje vreća pored destilerije.
Magarci jedino prijevozno sredstvo za transport.

Unloading bags next to the distillery.
Donkeys were the only means of transportation.

Zgrada destilerije «Petrola»
«Petrola» Distillery building



(Osobna knjižica).

Seoska blagajna u Grabju na Hvaru

Uknjižena zadruga ili neograničeno jamčenje.

Knjižica Zajmova

Br. 111a

Izpuštena dne Siečnja 1900

Viđeno

Od Seoske blagajne u Grabju na Hvaru

Starešina-ravnatelj — Odbornik

SEOSKA BLAGAJNA
Štedionica - Zajmovnica
GRABLJE NA HVARU