

Repositório ISCTE-IUL

Deposited in *Repositório ISCTE-IUL*:

2019-12-11

Deposited version:

Post-print

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Esteves, A. (2019). Constructing solidarity economy-based livelihoods. *Museum International*. 71 (1-2), 132-139

Further information on publisher's website:

10.1080/13500775.2019.1638069

Publisher's copyright statement:

This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: Esteves, A. (2019). Constructing solidarity economy-based livelihoods. *Museum International*. 71 (1-2), 132-139, which has been published in final form at <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13500775.2019.1638069>. This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with the Publisher's Terms and Conditions for self-archiving.

Use policy

Creative Commons CC BY 4.0

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a link is made to the metadata record in the Repository
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Beyond conservation and exhibition:

Promoting “mobilizational citizenship” by blurring the boundaries between museum and marketspace

Author: Ana Margarida Esteves

Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), Centro de Estudos Internacionais, Lisboa, Portugal

e-mail: anamargarida.esteves@gmail.com

Ana Margarida Esteves is a Senior Researcher at the Center for International Studies of Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), as well as an Invited Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Economy of the same institution. She holds a Ph.D. and M.A. in Sociology from Brown University, as well as a M.Sc. in European Studies from the London School of Economics. She is currently researching the convergence of solidarity economy and the commons in the development of alternative political economies. Her research and teaching interests include social and solidarity economy, commons, sustainability transitions and qualitative research methods.

Keywords: Solidarity Economy; Commons-based Livelihoods; Mobilizational Citizenship; Alternative Marketspaces; Public Space

Abstract

How can museums contribute to the development of commons-based livelihoods? This article explores this question by expanding the concept of museum beyond its classical roles of conservation and exhibition of significant artefacts for cultural and educational purposes, entering functions and fields of activity normally identified with those of marketspaces.

This conceptual exploration includes spaces which self-identify as museums but were created to support specific areas of economic activity, as spaces of performance and promotion of identities and practices, as well as commercialization. It also includes public spaces which blur the boundary between museum and marketspace, by combining the functions of conserving and displaying material and immaterial cultural heritage with that of being spaces of production and transaction of goods and services which represent such heritage.

Based on a literature review, illustrated by two case studies in Portugal, *Ecomuseu de Barroso* and *Cooperativa Terra Chã*, this article explores how hybrid public spaces which fulfil the functions of museum and marketspace politically legitimize and promote the economic sustainability of commons-based practices of production, build synergies and economies of scale between such practices, and connect their promoters with the wider public.

By promoting commons-based practices of production which were marginalized by the logic of capitalism and bureaucratic governance, they become social spaces where participating producers and consumers formally and informally build trust with cooperative practices of production, distribution and commercialization. They are also spaces of mobilization of symbols and practices of belonging, as well as promotion of grassroots leadership.

From cultural to civic capital: Constructing Solidarity Economy-based livelihoods

The institutionalist critique of the supposedly norm-free nature of the market, as well as its underlying instrumentalist logic, envisions alternatives to neoliberalism based on institutionally-backed normative systems. Scholars of “political consumerism” use such approach to explain how Community Supported Agriculture, Solidarity Purchasing Groups and other grassroots networks of organized market-based, politically oriented consumerism actions promote sustainable development through production re-localization and food system reterritorialization (Graziano and Forno 2012). Such networks promote direct producer-to-consumer exchanges which maximize income for producers by cutting middlemen out of transactions, in a way that supports the co-production of political and ecological knowledge among participating producers and consumers.

Authors such as Grasseni (2014) and Rakopoulos (2015) use the concept of Solidarity Economy to refer to the economic practices and social formations promoted within and through these networks, framing them as part of a wider political project of democratic deepening based on participatory governance and wider socio-economic inclusion. This still-evolving concept refers to cooperative, inclusive and self-organized alternatives to dominant economic structures, founded upon voluntary association, whose criteria of performance prioritizes the creation and redistribution of social value over capital accumulation (Laville 2016). It represents an alternative to corporate production and commercialization based on the prioritization of social goals over profit, as well as the promotion of worker self-management through the removal of the distinction between capital and labour through worker ownership, often in the form of cooperatives and associations, as well as in the form of networks of microenterprises; the promotion of equitable and mutually supportive relationships, both within individual initiatives and within wider society; and the promotion of effective equal decision-making power for each participant (Auinger 2009).

For Laville (2016), the trait that distinguishes Solidarity Economy from the wider field of Social Economy¹ is its focus on the potentialization and expansion of social capital as the organizing factor of production, as well as its mobilization to produce “civic capital” by orientating it towards the promotion of democracy, both within productive units and in wider society (pp. 244-5).

A significant example is *Esperança/Cooesperança*, a solidarity economy network based in the town of Santa Maria, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. This project is the outcome of a grassroots counter-hegemonic dynamics that emerged from the resistance to the 1964-85 military regime, led by the Liberation Theology-inspired Christian Base Communities. In the early 1980's, the regional clergy promoted, with the financial support of the German Catholic NGO Misereor, a microcredit initiative aimed at promoting the economic viability of commons-based practices of production promoted by subsistence farmers in the region by supporting their scaling up through the formation of cooperatives and microenterprises. The goal was to reverse the process of impoverishment and rural exodus promoted by the concentration of land by large soya and tobacco corporations, as well as the marginalization of small producers from the market by supermarket chains. This microcredit scheme was complemented by the creation of a marketspace, *Centro de Referência Don Ivo Lorscheider*, that is cooperatively managed by its participating producers. The marketspace, also used as a site of political education and mobilization by social movements and electoral candidates,

¹ Laville (2016) claims that Social Economy focuses on the institutional dimension of cooperative production and its complementarity with the welfare state and the market, in detriment of the promotion of democratic practices within such organizations and their mobilization towards emancipatory political projects (pp. 244-5).

served as a blueprint for the development of policy programs at the municipal, state and national level for Solidarity Economy (Sarria Icaza and Freitas 2006).

The trajectory of the Detroit-based James and Grace Lee Boggs Center to Nurture Community Leadership² and Incite/Focus³, a ‘fablab’ that “puts cutting-edge fabrication technology into community hands, support a whole spectrum of community production experiments from permaculture, swapmeets and skillshares to 3D printed buildings and digital fabrication” (Kawano 2018), indicates that cultural capital plays an equally central role as an organizing factor of Solidarity Economy-based production, as well as its mobilization to produce “civic capital”.

Beyond the classical concept of museum

This article expands the concept of museum beyond that of an institution that conserves a collection of objects of artistic, cultural, historical, ecological or scientific importance, making them available for public viewing through exhibits that may be permanent or temporary (Alexander and Alexander, 2007).

Such conceptual expansion includes in the concept of museum organizations which, besides fulfilling these functions, are places where economic practices are performed, culturally interpreted and promoted, in a way that supports their integration into a common livelihood. This includes not only institutions that self-identify as museums, but also community-managed urban and rural public spaces which combine the functions of a museum with those of a market space. These are social spaces where participating producers and consumers formally and informally build trust with specific practices of production, distribution and commercialization. They may contribute to expand the scope of counter-hegemonic practices of production, as well as the spaces within which they can reproduce themselves, by promoting contact and exchanges between their producers and consumers.

These spaces can be considered sites of what Escoffier (2018) calls “mobilizational citizenship”, as they are spatially situated focus of construction and manifestation of relationships which promote, in parallel to “market-based, politically oriented consumerism actions” (Graziano and Forno 2012: 122), the development of productive communities which “create social power that constrains traditional business models” and pressures them into some kind of adaptation with the expectations of stakeholders (Bauwens and Niaros 2017). That is the case of institutions which self-identify as museums, such as *Ecomuseu de Barroso*⁴, a multi-sited ethnographic museum located in the villages of Montalegre and Boticas, in the North-Eastern Portuguese region of Trás-os-Montes. It is also the case of organizations and networks which, although not identifying as museums, end up having similar functions of preservation, display and education about natural and cultural resources. One example is *Cooperativa Terra Chã*, located in the central Portuguese region of Ribatejo in the village of Chãos, municipality of Rio Maior.

The two projects expand existing social capital and transform it into “civic capital” (Laville 2016) by promoting the visibility and political legitimacy of economic practice which, due to their

² <http://boggscenter.org>

³ <https://www.incite-focus.org>

⁴ <http://www.ecomuseu.org/index/pt-pt>

characteristics, are marginalized and rendered invisible by the criteria of capitalist and bureaucratic governance.

They are spaces of embodiment, coordination, performance and promotion of counter-hegemonic identities, as well as of their development through formal and informal practices of learning and knowledge production. They support the construction of the political subjectivity and agency of their participants by giving visibility and politicized significance to their practices of production, as well as cutting middlemen off distribution and promoting transactions which “mobilize the community through immediate action in a form of direct democracy” (Rakopoulos 2015: 166).

This process activates the “agentic memory” of participating producers and consumers by mobilizing symbols and practices of belonging, as well as promoting grassroots leaderships through formal and informal initiatives and practices of decentralised protagonism (Escoffier 2018: 775).

Humanizing space: *Ecomuseu de Barroso*

Ecomuseu de Barroso was conceived by the municipal governments of the region as a core project of the regional strategy of sustainable development.

It is based on a methodology which regards demographic desertification, environmental degradation and loss of cultural identity as interrelated phenomena. It aims to reverse these trends by classifying, preserving and giving visibility to natural resources, as well as material and immaterial cultural heritage. Such heritage includes a wide range of sites, buildings, technologies and agricultural techniques, from waterfalls, ancient trees and forests, to Neolithic dolmens and engravings, watermills, monasteries, manor houses and human traction machines. It also includes a network of restaurants and privately and government-run shops, which sell products by subsistence farmers and artisans of the region. The village of Montalegre also has a museum site, which is used as a venue for the exhibition of local ecological and cultural heritage, educational initiatives and information about local touristic accommodation and other facilities.

This project contributes to “mobilizational citizenship” through a strategy of “humanization of space”⁵, based on an interpretation of the natural and cultural values that aims to revitalize the cultural identity of its inhabitants, as well as their relationship with the territory. Local knowledge is interpreted as an instrument of environmental presentation, as well as of participatory democracy and economic revitalization.

This contributes to counteract rural exodus, resulting from the deterioration of rural livelihoods in the region throughout the 20th century, as a result of the colonial war economy during the 1926-74 authoritarian regime, as well as the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy, which led to mass abandonment of agriculture and small manufacture in the region, as well as rural exodus and emigration. It also contributes to counteract the distancing of the remaining population vis-à-vis the state, resulting from a sense of powerlessness and alienation vis-à-vis political processes that seem to be concentrated in Lisbon or Brussels and not take the interests of the local population into account.

⁵ <http://www.ecomuseu.org/index/pt-pt/conheca/objetivos>

Much of the work of *Ecomuseu de Barroso* with watermills, human traction machines and traditional methods of wine and food production focuses on deconstructing the association between quality of life and the maximization of productivity made possible by mass production.

Besides deconstructing the aura of “backwardness” and inefficiency associated with water and human traction machines, the educational activities promoted by the museum show how they can contribute to economic and political empowerment, besides environmental preservation. These technologies and methodologies are attributed a political significance by being presented as instruments of promotion of local economies, which have the potential of promoting self-determination vis-à-vis globalized supply chains.

They are also attributed an aesthetic significance, as sources of products whose craftsmanship gives them a quality of “uniqueness” that provides pleasure and attributes status both to their producers and consumers.

The producers who participate in this “museum with no borders or time schedule” are endowed with the status of being promoters of material well-being and guardians of the regional cultural heritage and ecosystems. This status translates into “civic capital”, since they are integrated in the public governance of the museum and its initiatives through participatory democratic mechanisms.

Rediscovering the Commons through folklore: *Cooperativa Terra Chã*

Cooperativa Terra Chã is a cooperative of subsistence farmers and manufacturers that largely results from the national and international visibility achieved by the *rancho folclórico* of the village of Chãos.

This is a publicly supported ethnographic group, run by a community organization with the support of the municipality, which preserves the local musical tradition and promotes it in national and international ethnographic events. This promoted a bottom-up process of economic empowerment and emergence of grassroots leaderships, resulting in a regional development strategy based on participatory democratic and cooperative forms of governance including producers and the municipality. Like *Ecomuseu de Barroso*, *Cooperativa Terra Chã* is supported by the municipality as a central project in the regional development strategy, which is implemented and jointly managed by the members of the cooperative.

The work of cultural diffusion promoted by the local *rancho folclórico* increased the number of national and international visitors to the region, as well as the demand for products and experiences which authentically represent regional culture. Such demand led to synergies which were directed to promote the re-emergence of local commons-based forms of production that were nearly extinct due to rural exodus. That is the case, for example, of village-level cooperative cattle herding, a centuries-old tradition which was nearly extinct in the 20th century and re-emerged thanks to the synergies promoted by *Cooperativa Terra Chã*.

Such re-emergence was the result of a learning process, by grassroots and municipal-level political leaderships, with experiences of mass tourism and associated “pastiche” cultural products in other regions of Portugal and the Iberian Peninsula. The increase in the number of visitors coincided with a period of demographic and ecological desertification, as well as of a growing awareness of the

need to reverse that trend by reviving the local economy, de-centralizing economic and political power and involving the local population in governance processes.

The synergies that led to the creation of *Cooperativa Terra Chã* happened in concentric circles. The expectation of reciprocity in exchanges with similar groups at the national and international level led to the creation of a bed-and-breakfast and restaurant by local grassroots leaderships, with the support of the municipality. These organizations promoted an increase in visitors and with them an increase in demand for local goods and services. Such demand was intentionally directed by local grassroots leaderships to stimulate the local economy, by engaging regional subsistence farmers and smalls manufacturers in the elaboration of products which represented local livelihoods and traditions, which could be sold at the restaurant and Bed and Breakfast. These two businesses became sites of display and education about the ecology, culture and society of the region.

This form of economic valuation and promotion of grassroots commons-based practices of production promoted the economic as well as political empowerment of subsistence producers in the region, who became progressively involved in the management of the restaurant and Bed and Breakfast and their transformation into commons. This involvement led to the creation of the cooperative, its inclusion in the regional development strategy and the setting up of participatory mechanisms for its implementation.

Conclusions

Ecomuseu de Barroso and *Cooperativa Terra Chã* are examples of how the classical functions of a museum, when combined with those of a marketplace, can contribute to the sustainability of commons-based practices of production, as well as their scaling up through the creation of new commons, in a way that promotes “mobilizational citizenship”.

Both projects are part of regional development strategies in which the municipalities are directly engaged in the commoning of publicly and privately-owned spaces, which were turned into sites of performance, promotion and commercialization of goods and services which represent commons-based practices of production that are significant of the region’s cultural heritage.

Such strategies contribute to expand the scope of commons-based production, as well as the spaces within which it can reproduce itself, by promoting contact and exchanges between the agents of commons-based practices of production and the wider public. Such contact led to an increase in the demand of material goods and experiences that authentically represent the culture, livelihoods and habits of the regions where they are located. Local producers were intentionally involved in the production and commercialization of such goods, as part of systems-based strategies of regional development aimed at reversing rural exodus and environmental degradation. The revaluation and promotion of their livelihoods and practices of production increased their private revenues, therefore contributing to the economic sustainability of such practices. It also contributed to their political empowerment by reviving their agentic memory, through the assignation of the

role of guardians and promoters of local identity, well-being and environmental sustainability. To this also contributed their involvement in cooperative and participatory governance structures.

References:

Alexander, E.P.; Alexander, M. 2007. *Museums in motion: an introduction to the history and functions of museums*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.

Auinger, M., 2009. "Introduction: Solidarity Economics – emancipatory social change or self-help?". *Journal für Entwicklungspolitik*, 25: 4–21.

Bauwens, M., Niaros, V. 2017. *Changing Societies Through Urban Commons Transitions*. P2P Foundation. <http://commonstransition.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Bauwens-Niaros-Urban-Commons-Transitions.pdf>

Escoffier, E. 2018. "Mobilisational citizenship: sustainable collective action in underprivileged urban Chile", *Citizenship Studies*, 22(7): 769-790.

Grasseni, C. 2014. "Seeds of Trust. Italy's Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale (Solidarity Purchase Groups). *Journal of Political Ecology*, 21(1): 178-192.

Graziano, P. R.; Forno, F. 2012. "Political consumerism and new forms of political participation: The Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale in Italy" in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 644(1): 121-133.

Kawano, E. 2018. "Sevens ways to build the solidarity economy. *Transformation – Where love meets social justice*. 4 September 2018. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/transformation/emily-kawano/seven-ways-to-build-solidarity-economy>

Laville, J.L. 2016. *A Economia Social e Solidária: Práticas, Teorias e Debates*. Coimbra: Almedina.

Mance, E.A., 2007. "Solidarity Economics". *Turbulence: ideas for movement*: 1–9.

Rakopoulos, T. 2015. "Solidarity economy in contemporary Greece: 'Movementality', economic democracy and social reproduction during crisis". In Hart, K. *Economy For and Against Democracy*:161-181

Sarria Icaza, A.M., Freitas, M.R (org). 2006. *O Projeto Esperança/Cooesperança e a construção da Economia Solidária no Brasil: Relato de uma experiência*. Porto Alegre: Cáritas Brasileira.