

Community Based Solidarity Economy and Eco-Social Transformation

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Even if some European and national labor market or social policy programs focused on fostering local economy, the social imperative of social and solidarity economy did not enter the political or academic mainstream. In light of the consequences of neo-liberal globalization, socio-political considerations need to pay much more attention than before to the local living space as a place of active participation and integration, of collective self-organization and sustainable development. Shaping sustainable development raises questions about the logic behind socially integrated economic activity geared to maintaining the capacity for social, cultural, ecological and economic evolution. The ecological imperative of community economy seems to have a stronger effect to eco-social transformation. The strong re-discovery of community-based action research – after three decades of marginalization – is on one side resulting from the challenges of eco-social transformation, and on the other side it is another indicator for the growing weight of civil society as steering power in society, in this case in the scientific realm. It is obvious that eco-social transformation has to be based in processes of cooperative learning and participatory social change.

Key words: community economy, eco-social transformation, localisation, post-growth - society

Introduction

Since the 1980s community-based social and solidarity economies responding to specific local needs and countervailing eco-social damages have been a rapidly growing realm, arising from civil society. The concept of community economy is not a standardised position in economic sciences, even if different economic concepts based on ecological and socio-cultural responsibility, common coordination principles and rationality criteria, accord to community economy as diverse, complementary or alternative space of economic activities at local level.

Community economy allows attaining social, economic and ecological objectives through economic activity. It was generated in a variety of forms and ways in the past and is currently spreading in large variety across the globe. This economy imports formal organizations like cooperatives, social enterprises, mutual societies, associations or new solidarity economies and

more informal ones like traditional and new subsistence economies, exchange networks, complementary currencies, time-banks or urban agriculture.

Local alternatives to exploitation and capitalist economy can be traced back for more than 200 years to the beginning of the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century these alternative or complementary forms gathered during the big economic crisis in the 1920s and as a second wave at the end of the 1970s as reaction to the social and economic problems caused by mere neoliberal globalisation, whose dependency on world market dynamics, privatisation of public services and pressure on welfare systems has led to mass unemployment and growing poverty in the industrial societies (Elsen 1998).

The economist Richard Douthwaite published his much-acclaimed book *Short circuit* in 1996. It is amongst the best theoretical and practical substantiations of community economy. He elaborates the social aspect for a stronger independence of communities from world market dynamics and globally caused crises: ‘The most worrying aspect of the present crisis is that, for the first time in history, the rich no longer need the poor.’ (Douthwaite 1996: 29).

A strong impulse to bring community-based economy into the international focus of interest came from Latin America, especially from Brasil and Argentina, since the beginning of this century. The movement of *economía popular y solidaria* with its practical approaches, political and methodological reflections and theoretical groundings achieved a strong impact in academic networks in Europe, Canada and the United States (Elsen 2007) and led to the development of the first study programs in this field.

Worldwide societal problems such as mass unemployment, public and private poverty, social exclusion, environmental destruction and the evidence of climate change with its terrible consequences are increasing and becoming more visible. However, the awareness of community-based social and solidarity economies’s potential to contribute to saving livelihood, creating meaningful employment, combatting poverty, ensuring social integration and fostering sustainable development is still marginal. Community-based social and solidarity economy, beyond this background is to be considered in the context of a transformative social policy and an extended understanding of eco-social work that empowers especially disadvantaged groups to claim extensive rights and prerequisites of work and life. This is not only a question of individual rights and emancipatory requirements, but it is also an urgent need of societies to provide people with the capabilities to act and to take responsibility for themselves, for their community and their livelihood.

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or academic mainstream. In light of the consequences of neo-liberal globalization, socio-political considerations need to pay much more attention than before to the local living space as a place of active participation and integration, of collective self-organization and sustainable development. Shaping sustainable development raises questions about the logic behind socially integrated economic activity geared to maintaining the capacity for social, cultural, ecological and economic evolution.

The ecological imperative of community economy seems to have a stronger effect to eco-social transformation. The evidence of what Denis and Donella Meadows and their colleagues described in the 1970s (Meadows, Meadows, Randers and Behrens 1972), cannot be denied any more. Since the 1990s community economy has been discussed as a local strategy to confront growing ecological and social uncertainties and the multiple crises of global market economy. It has been recognized as a core strategy of eco-social transformation to reduce further threats of dangerous climate change and to create more independent, self-reliant and resilient communities. The new discourses about re-localization and pluralization of economic activities are strongly connected with the post-growth movement and the efforts for eco-social development.

Community Economy, Eco-Social Development and the Great Transformation

Karl Polanyi (1944) in his famous publication *The Great Transformation* refers to the historical process of the dis-embedding of economic activities out of their social-cultural context and the development of uncontrolled market dynamics that tend to control and utilise successively the social and cultural realms as well as natural resources for their purposes. This is the long and continuing process of mercantilism in which human abilities, land and other commons have been transformed into commodities, prized by supply and demand. Traditional socio-cultural meaning, norms and values of plural socio-economic activities have been removed in favour of a reductive economic model, following the pure utilitarian transaction in the capital-driven market process.

Following Polanyi, this process ends up in a situation in which economy is no longer embedded in its socio-cultural and natural context, but society and nature are transformed into resources for uncontrolled and self-referential market processes. Based on this concept, social and ecological concerns can be treated as 'externalities', delegated to society, while profit is privatised. The process described by Polanyi is directed towards an economic model of organised irresponsibility, abusing and destroying social, cultural and natural means of livelihood. In addition, globalized neoliberalism with its triumphal procession captured the definatory power to define the aim, the rationality criteria and the coordination principles of economy, which has always been a pluralistic sector, driven by a variety of motivations, aims and rationalities.

The third and most ambitious ‘Great Transformation’, the eco-social transformation of global mankind in contrast to the first (neolithic transformation) and the second great transformation (industrial revolution), will not be the result of an evolutionary social process. It has to be a reflexive and planned change of nearly all pillars of modern industrial societies, of production, consumption, socio-cultural and individual lifestyles. Eco-social transformation means a ‘worldwide remodelling of economy and society towards sustainability. ... Production, consumption patterns and lifestyles ... must be changed in such a way that global greenhouse gas emissions are reduced to an absolute minimum over the next decades’ (WBGU 2011: 5).

In industrial countries, against the backdrop of inevitable de-growth, it has to be a conscious effort to build regional resilience, to organize systems that rely on local food, local work, local resources and programs that strengthen regional and local economies (Randers 2012: 191). Community economy is a conscious pathway out of the rationality of organised irresponsibility. Its aim is to re-embed and reframe economic action into its socio-cultural and natural context and to make it part of community life, controlled by local people. Its (re-) implementation is one of the most important strategies of eco-social transformation for sustainability.

Aims, Rationalities and Coordination Principles

Community based economy as alternative and/or complementary structure is discussed as social and solidarity economy (SSE). The idea as well as its existing forms are alternative concepts to the dominant rationalities of economy and society, to the overweight of financial interests, the focus on self-interest and the fixation on competition and growth. In their existing real-life forms, approaches that pursue the idea of community economy are based on fundamental human, social and ecological needs, and they respect the limits of natural resources that can be used in a sustainable way. From this point of view, economic activity is predominantly to be considered in its reproductive function for people, nature and communities. It is about the preservation and sustainable organisation of basics that people need in order to exist and live together in communities. Social and solidarity economy can be understood as a kind of counter-culture, counter-economy, counter-democracy. It challenges the conventional societal and economic system. It is rooted in democratically run companies and creates a totally novel understanding of the social bond and connectedness in society (Wallimann 2014).

In a broader sense, the community economy concept can be connected with ‘development economics’ that focus on the satisfaction of basic human needs, while the majority of economic theories deal with human desires or preferences (Kamenetzky 1992: 181). This difference indeed is essential also in a global perspective and with respect to sustainable development. ‘Needs are

the only characteristic common to human beings in all societies at any time of their individual and social evolution' (Kamenetzky 1992: 182).

Manfred Max-Neef, Professor for development economics at the University of Santiago de Chile and holder of the Right Livelihood Award, in the mid-eighties of the last century drafted the concept of Human Scale Development, based on a theory of human needs and satisfiers. He shows that human needs are interrelated and interactive and combines two categories in a matrix: 'the interaction of, on the one hand, the needs of Being, Having, Doing and Interacting; and on the other hand, the needs of Subsistence, Protection, Affection, Understanding, Participation, Creation, Leisure, Identity and Freedom' (Max-Neef 1992: 199). Needs and satisfiers are not connected one-to-one. His concept substantiates a holistic theoretical base for a theory of sustainable community economy with a strong focus on the socio-cultural aspect. It puts the question of the sense of economic action and of how goods are generated and consumption is organized. 'The construction of human economy poses an important theoretical challenge, namely, to understand fully the dialectic between needs, satisfiers and economic goods. This is necessary in order to conceive forms of economic organization in which goods empower satisfiers to meet fully and consistently fundamental human needs' (Max-Neef 1992: 202). This concept explains the socio-cultural benefit of self-steered community-based economies like democratic associations, time-banks or culturally embedded subsistence economies. They create a surplus of material, socio-cultural and ecological benefits.

One basic difference between market-oriented and community-based economies lies in the specific context of origin following concrete citizens' needs, in diverse objectives, a distinct rationality and diverse coordination principles of acting. While commercial enterprises engage in economic activities to generate profit for their owners, community economies engage in economic activities for the sake of their community's interests. It is a form of economy which aims to achieve social objectives and not only monetary profit, even though they are mostly profitable. They rather reinvest their surplus to further their objectives.

The governance structures reflect this. They are coordinated by cooperation, democratic organisation, association, self-organisation and a focus on the common good as their principles of action. Members and users can control important decisions and transactions. The legal forms commonly associated with community economy are cooperatives, mutual societies, associations and foundations. Under most circumstances these legal forms are helpful instruments for achieving the objectives.

In the initial phase, these economies normally lack any legal structure. Particularly in this phase, they are highly informal not being organized as legal units. For example, most of the young self-

organized initiatives in urban agriculture are informal and spontaneous citizen initiatives, at least in their initial phase. The stable management of resources however requires the formation of a suitable organizational structure. If for example an urban food initiative tries to develop distributional systems, it will evolve into a food cooperative and enter the formal economic sector with a distinct, not primarily profit-orientated rationality. Despite the diversity of community-based economies, we can define some core principles, most of them already set out by the international cooperative movement more than 150 years ago:

1. Thinking economy as a multifaceted social system;
2. Using local resources and protecting natural and social livelihood;
3. Serving basic needs and distributing benefits in an equitable way;
4. Constructing economy in a democratic culture (one person, one vote);
5. Bundling diverse forces of concerned citizens;
6. Being aware of different concepts of ownership, access-rules and fair common pool resource-management;
7. Extending the interpretation of labour including all forms of meaningful work (family work, barter, subsistence work, gainful employment, civic involvement and so on).

Although community economies are mostly resulting from concrete needs and problems such as unemployment or a lack of means of livelihood, the solutions created under these circumstances of need or crisis open up future prospects for sustainable spaces and ideas for productive options. Thus, the recent developments of community economies should not be regarded as a regression into pre-modernity but as an anticipation of ways into a different, a reflexive modernity.

Re-Localization, Reflexive Modernization and Reframing Economy at Community Level

One of the implications of globalization, following Ulrich Beck (2000), is the increasing importance of local communities and the endeavour to decentralize and regionalize. This rediscovery is linked with the desire for identity, self-efficacy and participation. Localization is a principle and strategy for social, cultural and economic reorganization. Regionalization, localization, and new subsidiarity are guidelines for eco-social transformation. They enable integrative approaches, an efficient use of resources, and local-regional value-added circuits (Elsen 2007: 153). The traditional understanding of subsidiarity, which encompasses the priority

of smaller and true-to-life units against more general and larger ones, has been renewed in communitarian concepts against the background of globalization and the abstractness, impersonality and unswayable realities of modern societies.

The concept of reflexive modernization, developed by Beck, is one of the theoretical pillars of re-localization and thus of community economy. Societal modernization is a process of proceeding functional differentiation and the elimination of traditional frames. The specialization and separation of roles and sections lead to the typical uncontrollable effects of industrial societies and eco-social risks. The twenty-first century has to develop a reflexive concept of modernization, based on the knowledge about the limits and risks and on the responsibility for the eco-social effects of any development.

‘Localisation is not about isolating communities from other cultures, but about creating a new, sustainable and equitable basis on which they can interact’ (Douthwaite 1996: ix). A stronger localization of economic transaction does not mean complete self-sufficiency with everything being produced locally, nor does it mean the end of trade. Thus, the global protection of localities does not tend to re-implement protectionism but to foster local resilience and a greater independence from global economic and cultural processes. Its aim is to create a safe base for local development to meet the needs of local people (Hamm and Neumann 1996: 359).

Commons, Communing and community

Community based economy is not to be defined by the limits of territorial boundaries only. It reflects the interrelationship between economy and related individual and social behavior which depends on the correlation of people with their natural and cultural environment. This is the core principle of eco-social transformation and sustainable development. Notably, research dealing with eco-social development strongly emphasis the linkage between sustainability goals and norms, values, life quality or social well-being and analyses the social and economic structures of problems such as climate change or unequal distribution of wealth. There is international consensus in terms of the theory and practice of community development that local and demand-driven economies are central prerequisites for a stronger independent existence and sustainable development of communities.

The concept of ‘community’ is derived from the idea of common use and common good, communing to manage cohabitation based on mutuality. Consequently, it implies a sense of reciprocity and fairness, governing acts of recourse utilization and exchange based on equal rights. Assuring access to commons and the re-distribution of wealth must be the main political functions of societies. They need to aim at correcting the unequal distribution of goods and

access and thus at mitigating social injustice. Only the fair distribution of goods and chances of access to commons make reciprocity and equivalence possible in barter deals and contractual agreements.

Regarding growing social uncertainties, access to life goods like water and soil, to commons like public infrastructure, healthcare and education, or to cultural commons like knowledge are pillars for human and social development and the common good. Guaranteeing this access is a precondition to sustainability. Amartya Sen's (1999) core idea, that the development of human capabilities depends on the verification of real freedoms in form of a just distribution of opportunities, accords with this.

The long-term research of Elinor Ostrom (1990), who gained the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences in 2009, gave an important impetus to community economy. Thanks to her comprehensive research (Ostrom, Gardner and Walker 1994), community economy benefits from the global discourse on the sustainable management of commons and alternatives to the commercial privatisation of common pool recourses. Regarding the underlying principles of communing, the relationship of users between each other, their relationship to common resources and the design rules for sustainable management of these recourses, we can find some core rationalities and acting principles that characterise community economy:

1. A prevailing theory of collective action;
2. The role of social capital and the meaning of trust and norms in economic transactions;
3. The importance of networks as forms of social capital;
4. Rules for sustainable common pool management and communing.

The term 'community' then implies some core goals, principles of coordination and limits to economy:

- the entity of creation, distribution and use of means of livelihood;
- common ownership of natural, economic and cultural resources (commons) and their management in a fair, democratic and sustainable way (communing).

This involves imagining economy differently. It means to take notice of everything we do to ensure the material and immaterial functioning and well-being of households, communities and nations. It means to find ways of framing an economy that can reflect this wider reality. In such a reframed economy we might imagine ourselves as economic actors on many different stages – as

actors who can reshape economies so that environmental and social well-being, not just material output, are addressed (Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy 2013: 3).

The Transformative Power of Community-Based Economy

A central aspect of eco-social transformation can be seen in civil society's corrective and countervailing power (Fung and Wright 2003). There are different conclusions one can draw from the actual emergence of socio-economic activities and networks. Not at least, they are signalling the transfer of participative democracy to the economic sector. They also show the consequences citizens are drawing from having realized that the dependencies and weaknesses of politics and the irresponsibility of the economic system require to draw a line and to provide complementary and alternative structures driven and controlled by themselves. However, these civil society-based associative constructs are open to market and state, and frequently they act like incubators, transforming informal into formal solutions or formal into community-based associative ones.

A core principle and aim as well as the strategic base of eco-social transformation are the capabilities of citizens to act collectively. The comprehensive ability to associate, cooperate and create self-organized solutions have been systematically unlearned during the historical process of the division of labour and the process of functional differentiation of systems and roles in modern societies. Systematic individualization is a core principle of neoliberalism, and the ability for collective action, the management of common pool resources, self-organization and the development of a strong civil society seem to be the most challenging assignments of eco-social transformation.

According to Jürgen Habermas (1981), the action patterns in civil society context are strongly connected with internal processes of communication and understanding. In this context his theory of communicative action implies a reference to the sources of social innovation. The basic differences between the acting-logics of the systems market and state in contrast to those of civil society carry the potential of new institutional arrangements and solutions. While market processes are governed by the rationalities of capital and competition and state processes by law and power, civil society actors, driven by common interest, coordinate their affairs by communication in a life-world context. Not only these differences cause processes of eco-social transformation. The communicative rationality and the reciprocal interaction between different motivations and rationalities, processes of differentiation or new combinations in the development of eco-social economies are drivers of social innovation in a broader sense, creating by this new solutions and options. Also, Ostrom (2009a, 2009b) emphasizes the importance of

communicative rationalities for negotiation and conflict management as well as the significance of socially embedded and interconnected institutions as a basis for sustainable commons' management. This overlaps with Habermas.

The rationality is that of lifeworld concerns, and the coordination principles are association, interpersonal communication, cooperation and the coordination of diversity. The hybrid structures of movements, initiatives and associations within this realm emerge in multifaceted forms. Especially in the initial stage these associations are strongly focused on the common issue. The hybridity of the structure enables flexible adaptations to different needs and options (Elsen 2007). The objectives span beyond the interests of particular groups, taking on a new political dimension. For example, community economies generate social capital and improve resilience through cooperation and the joint management of commons. They follow an independent logic of economic action with social objectives. This counterbalances the dominance of profit and competition as main control instruments for economic activities. The potential lies in the extended logic of action following specific needs and in the effect that civic involvement has on people's own lives as well as on common concerns. Regardless of their different forms and contexts from which they have emerged, they show distinct similarities, and the attempts to conceptualise these economies make it clear that they constitute a civil society based complementary structure to meet the needs of communities.

The hybridity of organizational forms and the plurality of action and rationalities characterise this alternative space. Well-established delimitations between private and public, political and social, or cultural and economic are challenged by these forms of appropriation and intervention. This can be called the potential of the 'as-well-as' in contrast to the 'either-or' logic that coins the systems market and state in modern societies. The dissociation of societal sectors has been a guarantor of the self-referential logic of neoliberal economy – an economy, following its own rationality, independent from any other societal interest. On this ideological base, the neoliberal practice of externalization of societal costs out of economic action could be constructed.

Civil society-based associations have social, ecological and economic objectives. They act within the economic sector, are embedded in civil society and challenge ecological, social or labour market issues. Hence, they penetrate also the systems market and state and effectuate integration as alternative draft to externalization and dysfunctional differentiation. Sliding transitions from the informal to the formal sector are possible, and the mixture of multiple activities and roles has an innovative effect also by the pluralization of perspectives. The democratic and not hierarchic structures up to the cooperative principle of 'one person, one vote' require and enable a broader perspective of participants in a learning context for active citizenship.

Apart from informal economic activities that arise from adversity, it is important to pay attention to those that emerge as a reflected alternative to social distortion or as a responsible step towards sustainability. They are characterized by their actors' motivation and build an experimental ground for a new kind of local economy. They are part of the alliance described by Habermas as movement of 'growth critics' dissidence' that aims to strengthen the vital foundations of life-worlds against administrative powers and capital through forms of self-organisation at grassroots level (Habermas 1985: 156).

The capability of individuals and groups to self-organize and the representation of own and common concerns depend on personal, social, economic and political preconditions. This capability is the core competence of active citizenship. However, it follows the social mechanism of silent selectivity, varying along the demarcation line of social inequality (Elsen 2007). The theory of social capital developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1985) is helpful to understand the intrinsic and sociocultural depth effects of the lack of cultural and social capital. This capital establishes the personal basis for active and self-confident participation and self-organization in all societal sectors. Civil society actors, also those who are not adept to articulate their needs and opinions, must have adequate options to participate. If we want them to participate in democratic processes, it is important to create spaces for social innovation, characterized by openness and an enabling political culture. The activation and moderation of citizens' involvement can be supported by intermediaries as facilitators and change agents.

Prosperity Beyond Growth

Within the frame of limited global resources, quantitative economic growth is not the solution but the problem. However, more than 40 years after the evidence of eco-social damages was forecasted in the report of the Club of Rome, "economic growth" still seems to be a mantra for most politicians and economists. Growth, not prosperity, has been and continues to be the leading objective of the world. The awareness for finiteness seems to be something egregious and frightening.

Yet, from the margins the conviction is divulging that unlimited growth of an economic system embedded in an ecosystem which is finite is simply impossible. The demands 'on the containing ecosystem for regeneration of raw material "inputs" and absorption of waste "outputs" must, ... be kept at ecologically sustainable levels as a condition of sustainable development. This change in vision involves replacing the economic norm of quantitative expansion (growth) with that of qualitative improvement (development) as path of future progress' (Daly 1996: 1). Herman Daly already drafted, together with John Cobb in their remarkable publication *For the Common Good*

(Daly and Cobb 1989), a model for sustainable economy based on communities. Their argumentation refers to two kinds of fundamental limits of growth economy: the biophysical and the ethicosocial. The first is explainable by the limits of the host ecosystem, by entropy and ecological interdependencies. Relating to the ethicosocial limits, they consider the costs, imposed on future generations, the reduction of species and biodiversity, the effects on welfare systems and health, the corrosive effects on moral standards and the glorification of self-interest (Daly 1996: 33–37).

Today, almost twenty years after Daly's publication, a colourful post-growth movement has emerged in civil society, presenting a variety of practical approaches to sustainability like urban agriculture, cooperatives, alternative currency and so on. There are many economists and social scientists drafting concepts for a post-growth society and a post-growth economy. The community context plays a central role for all these real laboratories, not only in sense of territorial limits but in the sense of a new economic culture connected with new forms of communing and common use, the reduction of individual consumption, civil self-organisation and a post-material lifestyle.

According to Tim Jackson, one of the new post-growth economists, we first of all have to consider that growth is not an aim in itself and that prosperity is not captured by conventional measures of economic activities like the GDP. Prosperity consists in our ability to flourish as human beings – within the ecological limits of a finite planet. The challenge for our society is to create the conditions under which this is possible. An appropriate measurement of people's capabilities for flourishing has to be based on the knowledge of the underlying human and social resources required to strengthen people's capabilities to participate in the life of societies and to create resilient social communities (Jackson 2009: 181–182).

Nico Paech, critical German consumption economist, is a very popular speaker at conferences and European Universities. He outlines a post-growth society and economy with diverse starting points and feasibilities. It is about reducing, repairing and recycling as well as about the reuse of goods, the common use of commodities, own production of food and artefacts, thus about exhausting all possibilities of subsistence and the potential of sufficiency at local level. The core principle behind all these approaches is that of re-embedding economic activities into the socio-cultural context of community and by this fostering social norms and the relationship between people. His concept countervails economy for pure profit accumulation. He shows that modern subsistence unfolds its agency in the direct social environment, in the local and regional context (Paech 2015: 37–39). Following Paech, 60 per cent of economic transactions in a post-growth society will be organized mainly in cooperatives and networks on local and regional level. Being able to produce, repair and use recourses in an individual and creative way becomes a

worthwhile competence in his concept. In view of the growing post-growth movement, this thinking becomes more and more spread.

Recent Examples and their Impact for Communities

Recent creations of community-based economies mirror fundamental changes in society, the reaction of local civil society actors to these changes and to urgent societal needs. Especially young and well-educated persons seem to be followers of a post-material lifestyle and supporters of new social subsistence. Creative forms of re-using, reducing and recycling are activities in community centers, garage-shops and repair-cafes. Recycling art is a strong trend to perform a new lifestyle of eco-social awareness.

One of the strongest motivations for citizens' self-organized alternatives is food sovereignty. Urban agriculture is a global movement which already influences the local policy sector, innovative urban planning, design, education and social work. Systems of time banking are booming, showing a new culture of reciprocity and mutuality. The revival of cooperative solutions in new fields and new forms like social and healthcare cooperatives or cooperatives of the elderly, combined with time banks or community cooperatives, demonstrate that collective organizing of common pool resources is possible. It illustrates a new sense of self-advocacy and self-organizing as well as the promotion and defense of the common good and citizens' responsibility and rights.

These societal trends, most of them connected with a voluntary renouncement of consumption, are widespread in social environments of material and cultural surplus. The usual demarcation line is effective also in these alternative spaces that could open options for self-confident participation of disadvantaged groups. Social work should recall its theoretical knowledge and methodological competences in community development, including community economy as a central instrument and goal.

New Cooperatives

Cooperatives are the historical alternatives to capitalist economy and they have been as well emergency solutions as reflexive diverse economic cultures since the beginning of the capitalist processing. They are gaining new topicality under the recent needs of eco-social transformation and regarding their structure and normative base, they represent the potential of hybrid organizations embedded in community dynamics which has been described above. As stakeholder-driven enterprises they are the classical counterpart to shareholder economy. They

cause a pluralization of actors, ideas and motivations in local economy. Their specific potential stems from the opportunities to bundle and combine resources, to disconnect from world-market-pressure, to compensate monetary capital and to integrate civil society actors.

The common interests of members, not capital accumulation is the main objective. Common use of resources and inclusive ownership-forms avoid speculation, foster processes of communing and give access to community-members. Decision-making in cooperatives is based on members votes and not on the value of shares. The principle of “one person – one vote” could be a model for all community organizations. The prevalent separation of roles in economic processes is canceled in community based cooperatives and members act in diverse roles.

Some examples: Cooperatives have the potential to eradicate poverty and to respond to concrete needs of communities. Social cooperatives corresponding to the Italian model and its legal and structural framework are best-practice examples for social innovation and new institutional arrangements in social policy. They are based on reciprocity and respond to special needs. They mix professional work, self-help and volunteering and they are an alternative draft against the incapacitation of concerned people and a step to self-advocacy. The provision with everyday goods and services, especially in peripheral rural areas, is a precondition for maintaining a community and the living of people on site. A cooperative neighborhood store can provide a lively multifunctional community center: ‘All you need under one roof’ – the supply of essential goods, post service, second hand, coffee-corner, black board, car sharing and mobility service, direct marketing of local products and last but not least communication. The cooperative organization of local services and infrastructure are substituting public providers under the pressure of public poverty. They are basically a re-privatization of public services, as government is drawing out of its responsibility for this field. Yet, the cooperative option contains the chance of preventing a purely commercial privatization in favor of organizational models that are controlled by citizens and provide access for all.

Urban Agriculture

Movements for the appropriation and self-determined use of urban spaces and for reactivating subsistence options in cities have been emerging for about 10 years. The trend towards urban agriculture or community gardening for social, cultural or ecological purposes can be seen in almost all regions of the world, and even in Europe urban food production is not only a field of collective self-realization but also an answer to new poverty. In some European cities food security has become a strong issue. Especially after the multiple crises of 2008 onwards, with subsequent austerity policies being enforced in several European countries, urban food production has in some places, mostly in Southern Europe, again become a means to mitigate

private and public poverty. Particularly in the field of urban food production or repair and re-use initiatives, innovative ideas have evolved that could be developed further as options providing complementary and alternative economic spaces to meet local needs as well as being steps to sustainable communities (Elsen and Schicklinski 2015 forthcoming).

Community Supported Agriculture

A global movement for local food sovereignty is emerging as a counter power against industrial food production, genetically modified organisms and the appropriation of power of international corporations in the food sector. This movement is strongly connected with the post-growth and other eco-social movements and it benefits from diverse food-scandals and growing consumers uncertainty. Consumers ally with small bio-producers in the agricultural sector to support them in the unequal competition and the political and market structures in favor of the international corporations and, at the same time assure healthy food for their needs.

There are different approaches within this realm of solidarity agriculture, called community supported agriculture (CSA). On global level, the actors are organized in the international network for community supported agriculture, URGENCI. In general, consumers build a partnership with bio-producers in their local environment and reduce producers' risks by financing parts of the production costs to enable them a secure livelihood. Further models are community connected agriculture, an approach in which local agriculture is linked with educational and social aims and community financed agriculture, in which solutions are based on local cooperatives and mutual support. In Italy, the movement of solidarity consumption groups (GAS Gruppi Acquisire Solidale) is widespread. Citizens get together more or less spontaneously and buy fair and eco-produced goods directly from the producers.

Regarding the global *challenges*, these experiments, much of them developed in further times of crises, cannot be appreciated enough. The actors are pioneers for re-localization, the control of local food production, responsible consumption and production and eco-social transformation.

Community Development and Transformative Research

Eco-social transformation is an ambitious task. Challenges of global change and life-world problems at local level are highly complex and located at different levels. In such comprehensive fields disciplinary analyses quickly reach their limits. The complexity of research questions requires comprehensive and integrated approaches. The integration of different claims and forms

of knowledge as well as the action-oriented pooling of resources and skills for designing transformation becomes a specific feature of transformative types of research and development.

The strong re-discovery of community-based action research – after three decades of marginalization – is on one side resulting from the challenges of eco-social transformation, and on the other side it is another indicator for the growing weight of civil society as steering power in society, in this case in the scientific realm. It is obvious that eco-social transformation has to be based in processes of cooperative learning and participatory social change. The methodology of participatory community-based action research, having been developed for about four decades, is the most important instrument for community development, and it is the adequate approach to generate community economy.

Transformative research is characterized by the generation of the following types of knowledge: 1. system-knowledge: correlations and processes between components; 2. target knowledge: requested changes defined with concerned people; 3. transformation knowledge: recognition of options to initiate processes of requested changes; 4. acting knowledge: action and reflection in iterative cycles. Experts in community development will immediately recognize these typical steps and targets as those of a community development process. Social work in research, practice and education has disregarded this important field and should remember it also because disadvantaged groups are mostly concerned by eco-social challenges and their ability to cope creatively with material deficits could be a benefit in a post growth society. Social work as community development could build up community based future laboratories. The co-creation of knowledge and shared visions of an eco-social future could be a rewarding task.

Knowledge is power. We live in a world, where knowledge is produced and used to make change, inform others, support a perspective, or justify an action. Hence, the question of who produces knowledge and uses knowledge is central to understand how power is created, taken or maintained. Being able to produce knowledge, then, is a route to power, empowerment, and influence (Kirby, Greaves and Reid 2006: 1). It is a core step to eco-social transformation.

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