United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

The Hidden Side of SSE

Social Movements and the Appropriation and "Translation"
of SSE into Policy (Latin America)

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Introduction

> We strongly believe not only that another world is possible, but also that it is increasingly necessary (Manifesto of the European Network of Social and Solidarity Economy, Barcelona, 2011) [1]
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> In our dreams we have seen another world, an honest world, a world decidedly more fair than the one in which we now live ... this world was not something that came to us from our ancestors. It came from ahead, from the next step we were going to take (Sub commander Marcos, 1/3/94 edited by Ponce de Leon, 2001: 18).

There is growing interest within international organisations and governmental institutions in obtaining support from social movements and SSE organizations for new public policies and laws that encourage their engagement and participation from below, and facilitate their access to the new policy schemes (see UNRISD Call for Papers 2013, Fonteneau et al. 2010, 2011; UNRISD 2010). The significance of this consideration is in underscoring the growing importance of civil society actors (including social movements) in rethinking 'development' and in devising and effecting development policy, particularly in the period of global crisis.

This paper addresses another concern emanating from this disposition of international development policy with regards to social movements—namely the process of appropriation and *translation* of SSE practices into state policy. By *translation* I mean the processes, mechanisms and dynamics through which the state incorporates the cooperative and solidarity ethos of the SSE practiced by social movements through policy, by demarcating a terrain that, as Vázquez (2011: 36) suggests with reference to the epistemic violence of modernity, 'renders invisible everything that does not fit in the "parameters of legibility" of [its] epistemic territory.' *Translation* entails a distinction between 'acceptable and unacceptable forms of institutional engagement' (Claeys 2012: 859) made by the state, and the subjugation of the emancipatory dimension of SSE into the logic of power.

For the past two decades civil society organisations and social movements— particularly in the Global South—have been experimenting with non-profit forms of local and cooperative production, distribution, land occupation and use, driven by communal values, and organised thorough collective decision-making processes and direct participation of those involved in these endeavours. Many of these movements belong to national and transnational networks such as the Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of the Social and Solidarity Economy (RIPESS), which are concerned with facilitating the development of the SSE as well as rendering it visible worldwide.

These pioneering developments have received attention from critical scholars who propose participatory and 'people-centred development' (Nieverdeen Pietersen 1998). Under the 'Alternative Development' (AD) paradigm, the SSE offers a critique of the liberal vision of development for it embraces the principles of collective property, distribution of wealth to meet needs of people rather than capital; freedom of association and autonomous decision-making (Dacheaux and Goujon 2012: 208 and

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[1] http://www.ripesseu.net/en/presentation/manifest.html

206). The AD discourse encourages associative forms of production, sustainable development, the economic support for the marginalised through the appropriating of land and housing, women's empowerment, the revival of 'the local' (Santos and Rodriguez Garavito, 2006; Escobar 1992).

However, while AD introduces elements of solidarity and proposes changes in the type and scope of growth, it neither challenges the market economy (Coraggio 2010) nor 'the concept of economic growth *per se'* (Santos and Rodriguez Garavito 2006: xxxix-xl). This is problematic for many who believe that human realisation cannot be attained by means of improving the management of capitalism and the distribution of wealth (Gudynas 2012b; Esteva 2010). Many social movements repudiate the 'growth' development model and see themselves as articulating alternatives *to* development, with SSE being at the heart of these elaborations around the notion of *buen vivir* (living well).

SSE movements and networks diagnosed that capitalism is undergoing a multiple, interconnected and unparalleled crisis that combines an ecological, energy, food, environmental, poverty, hunger, crises, which are matched with the increase in the means of violence and social control by nation states and the free movement of global capital. For example, in a press release: 'Social Solidarity Economy at the 2013 WSF in Tunisia', the RIPESS member organizations at the WSF claim that 'the SSE is not an economy of repair but *the construction of a new worldview and applicable alternatives to neoliberal economic devastation.*' [2] Since the pressure for growth is embedded in capitalism (Smith 2011), movements argue that we are required to engage with 'alternative visions of democracy, economy and society' (Escobar, 1992: 22) and non-capitalist political practices (see Coraggio 2011). They disagree with the idea that 'capitalist efficiency and resource allocation is the best we can come up with' (Smith, 2011) with SSE contributing to this. As Smith highlights, 'this belief is incompatible with an ecological economy'. Gudynas calls it 'the dream of benevolent capitalism' (2012a). SSE movements do not 'accept the reality of capitalist relations and institutions that calls for a new 21st century social contract' (Utting 2012), but means a different pathway that, as Utting suggests, 'calls for very different growth, production and consumption patterns, and power relations.' Conceived in this way, SSE 'seeks to change the whole social and economic system and put forth a different paradigm of development that upholds solidarity economy principles' (Kawano 2013), it is about 're-socializing economic relations' (Gibson-Graham 2006: 79).

As a counter-hegemonic practice, SSE is inherently *political* and it is located at the centre of a broader debate about the viability and desirability of the capitalism. In Latin America where the crisis of capitalism is explained as a 'crisis of civilization', i.e. an impossibility of (re)production of dignified human life on the planet (Lander 2010), has become a political laboratory of SSE practices. As Biekart highlights (2005: 2) the violence of market-led policies (privatisation, breakdown of institutions, regressive income distribution, unemployment, poverty created a 'time-bomb that only needed to spark off'. Alternative socio-economic arrangements by a variety of civil society actors emerged strongly in response to unemployment, deprivation or

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[2] http://www.ripesseu.net/en/infos/news/news-details/article/press-release-social-solidarity-economy-at-the-2013-wsf-in-tunisia-1.html

resourcelessness (Wilkes 2004) during the 1980s and 1990s when a wave of citizen's and movements' protests led by the landless, jobless, the 'poor', indigenous people began to put their 'emancipatory energy' (Santos 2001: 78) at the service of this 'social and political construction' (Coraggio 2010). Aníbal Quijano (2009) put it like this:

> 'It is probably the first time in the history of the colonial matrix of power that we are not only hopeful toward the future, we are also working toward that future, and we are beginning to build that future, we are at this very moment building it. This is not a simple image…neither is a utopia, in the classical sense of the world. This is happening in the planet and in that sense it is … a phenomenon that manifests itself as a real tendency of a historical necessity'

In this paper, I suggest that the *SSE is a tool for 'organising hope'* (Dinerstein 2013) that is a practice that enable people to anticipate alternatives –future- practices, relationships, horizons, in the present. By *Hope* I don't mean the wish for a better future or dream with a utopian fantasy but, following German philosopher Ernst Bloch (1959/86), that the 'Real is process' and the 'world is unclosed'. To Bloch there exists in the present a concrete possibility of prefiguring what he calls 'the-not-yet-become.' Hence, Hope is not 'utopian' in the wishful sense of the word but wilful, i.e.: it guides concrete action (Levitas, 1990).

In recent years, the process of appropriation and *translation* of SSE into the logic of the state and international development has intensified. Moving from being directed to 'alleviate poverty 'to promoting 'development' (Coraggio 1999: 82; 2008), World Bank funded Community Driven Development (CDD) programmes support 'participatory decision-making, local capacity building, and community control of resources.'[3] (Dinerstein, 2010) These policies transform SSE into a tool for neoliberal governance promoted by international development, which encourage decentralisation, micro-ventures, and community sustainability. But rather than enabling the free development of SSE, this kind of translation dispossessed SSE from its emancipatory potential as it befits institutional efforts to reframe social policies along the lines of market-oriented liberalism from the state and International Development Institutions.

Cornwall and Brock (2005: 4) highlight how new policy '*buzzwords'* such as 'participation', 'empowerment' and 'poverty reduction' are used for the reframing of World Bank policy discourse as 'feel-good terms'. The new vocabulary possesses a 'moral tone' (p.8) that 'speak[s] to the laudable aim of enabling poor people to have voice and choice…In the texts of mainstream development agencies, this triad of "good things' is used to purvey a storyline that situates them as guardians of rightness and champions of progress' (p. 15) While catchwords are associated to ownership, accountability, governance and partnership that correspond to the neoliberal governance, they exclude another association with 'dissident meanings' such as 'social justice', 'redistribution' and 'solidarity' (p. 18) are excluded. The policy rhetoric demarcates the limits of what 'participation' and 'empowerment' mean. Insofar as it excludes dissident meanings, this rhetoric is inevitably realised through political processes that include co-optation, coercion, and in many occasions direct

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[3] http://go.worldbank.org/24K8IHVVS0

state violence that is imposed to those who do not purchase such storyline. This leads to a struggle *over the meaning of SSE* as movements are compelled to 'navigate the tensions' between being integrated into the logics of power and development, and the possibility to move beyond it (Böhm et al. 2010). The struggle over the meaning of SSE unfolds through conflicts over the scope of the law, welfare provision, participatory processes and budgets, and policy that might enable or deter the free development of SSE.

Social movements and progressive governments in Latin America: the struggle over the meaning of SSE

The contentious politics between movements and the state that spread out during the neoliberal period when mobilised citizens and movements openly confronted neoliberal reforms and policy, did not disappear with the political shift to the centre-left during the first decade of 2000s, but attained a different form. Unlike neoliberal governments, centre-left administrations claim to be determined to take on board movements' demands and expand the rights of indigenous and non-indigenous subaltern groups, facilitating self-determination, self-organisation and self-management (Seoane, Taddei and Algranati 2011). This political shift to the left by new governments, which many see as a revolutionary process in itself, is largely credited to the social mobilisations against neoliberalism (Prevost et al. 2012; Stahler-Sholk et al. 2008). Most of these governments brought about political innovation such as the creation of 'plurinational' states and the incorporation of the *buen vivir* indigenous cosmology into the state's agenda (CAOI 2010). Overall, They are presently achieving economic growth, decline of income inequality, improvements in education, social and labour policy and healthcare systems.

Yet, the region is not free from the dictates of the financial markets (Muñoz Cabrera 2012). While seeking to promote new forms of participation and engagement at the grassroots via public policy, the policies have not always reflected the aspirations of the movements in pursuit of 'good living' (*buen vivir)*. SSE inspired policies have often been promoted simultaneously with the commodification of natural resources, the intensification of extractivism, changes in energy and agrarian policies that are that are affecting rural live hoods and indigenous communal life, on behalf of transnational corporations.

In this section, by use examples of three well-known Latin American movements I discuss a hidden aspect of SSE, i.e. the *politics of* appropriation and translation of SSE into policy. I underline how, through the use of the law and policy, the state *demarcates the terrain* for SSE to develop, this demarcation being a necessary condition for 'economic development and growth to be achieved, how SSE practices to subordinated to this logic, and how this is challenged by these movements and the implications of it.

Indigenous movements and the problem of autonomy

Indigenous autonomies present challenges to international development institutions and nation states, for indigenous autonomy is opposed to the notion of 'development' and belongs to the indigenous cosmology of *Buen Vivir* which draws on indigenous ancestral practices and experiences, particularly from those in the Amazon and

Andean regions (see CAOI, 2010). As well as containing practical orientations towards production, organization and distribution, *buen vivir* covers specific meanings attributed to time, progress, human realisation, and the relationship between sociability, sustainability and nature, that make communal practices as based on traditions, customs and cosmologies to which Eurocentric notion of 'participation' and 'empowerment' as well as 'civil society' are alien.

The *Zapatista movement* emerged in the Lacandona jungle (South East Mexico, Chiapas) on 1 January 1994 against the Mexican government's participation in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which demanded the opening up indigenous lands to large agro-business. But it was more than that. They declared war to the Mexican government and argue that globalisation was a *war against humanity*. Unlike other armed movements' they claimed that they did not want the power of the state and that they had armed themselves to be heard. With their faces covered 'to make themselves visible', they claimed 'Enough is enough!' and demanded democracy, liberty and justice. They became a symbol of dignity and resistance worldwide.

Since 2003, the Zapatistas practice of self-government or 'autonomy *de facto*' in many communities of Chiapas through autonomous self-governing municipalities called Good Government Councils (*Juntas del Buen Gobierno*, JBG).[4] Each JBG delivers and administrate justice, mediates conflicts between autonomous councils and government councils, issues identity cards, discusses goals related to welfare provision (health, education, various projects) promotes and supervise projects and community programmes; denounces violations to human rights, guarantees bicultural education and health, organised cooperative, implement agrarian legislation.

Autonomy de facto is the outcome of a long-term s*truggle over the meaning of autonomy* between the EZLN and the Mexican state and international institutions, for the latter have sought to appropriate and translate the Zapatistas resistance into a tool for neoliberal governance. In 1996, the Zapatistas and the Mexican government signed the San Andres Accords (SAA) by which the latter committed itself to recognise indigenous people's right to exercise autonomy and the guarantee of self-government and collective production by the law. But the SAA were *not* put into practice but resisted by Zedillo government, who opted for a repressive policy instead. The massacre of Acteal in December 1997, where 45 people were assassinated (including children) contradicted the government's willingness to negotiate and marked a breaking point in the use of repression by the state in Chiapas (Ceceña 2001).

After a year of intense mobilisation, the law was enacted. It accredited the right to self-government to indigenous communities on the bases of the territorial organisation, and political and administrative organisation of *free municipality*. The law specified what kind of indigenous authorities were legally recognised and how

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[4] By 2007 there were 38 Autonomous Rebel Zapatistas Councils (Municipalidades Autónomas Rebeldes Zapatistas, MAREZ). These self-organised and self-governed political communities cover almost 40% of the Chiapas state (30,000 km², involving 1,100 communities of 300 to 400 inhabitants each (Ouviña, 2007). The MAREZ are organised in five Snails (*Caracoles*) each of which has a JBG. The *Caracoles* are also cultural 'spaces', gathering schools, assembly rooms, sport and rest zones, health centres, and cooperatives.

they should be elected. The legislation, proposed a form of local democracy (Burguete Cal y Mayor, 2004) that encouraged 'decentralisation', 'empowerment' and 'participation from below'. Deeply disappointed, the Zapatistas began a process of demilitarisation of the movement towards the strengthening of its civil component, and emerged after three years of silence with the JBG.

The government's response to autonomy *de facto* has been a counter-insurgent policy that intended to disempower the movement. Paramilitary organisations became NGOs and began to promote the formation of cooperatives and facilitating the access to the deed to the indigenous land after the 'illegal distribution' made by the Zapatista agrarian reform (Dinerstein, Ghiotto and Pascual, 2013). Between 2006 and 2008 new social programmes were launched in order to re-organise and channelled citizens' demands' (e.g. the Chiapas Solidarity Institute and the programme of Sustainable Rural Cities, both in 2007). To the Zapatistas, these policies, and particularly the latter plan matches the Word Bank Programme Puebla-Panamá (PPP), which is a regional development strategy which involves the use of indigenous lands for exploitation of resources in the Southeast of Mexico.

Urban movements and the meaning of dignified work

One of the most significant dimensions of SSE is the development of alternative forms of cooperative work and self-management connected to communal needs and the democratisation of decision-making processes. The *Unemployed Workers Organizations (*UWOs*, also called *Piqueteros)* in Argentina -born out of a series of protest ('roadblocks') carried out since 1996 in areas affected by mass unemployment produced by privatisation and decentralisation- constitute an example of such endevours. While mobilising the unemployed and their communities and families to demand employment programmes, job creation and the end of criminalisation of poverty, the UWOs began to create work cooperatives and develop communal projects by means of appropriation of state resources (employment and social programs) and use them for collective purposes challenged the individualistic logic of workfare and state focus policy and reconceptualised 'work' in capitalist society.

During the late 1990s and beginning of 2000s, the Piqueteros offered a critique of capitalist work from 'outside the labour market' (Dinerstein, 2002) connecting work with the quality of dignity and a non-capitalist practice of solidarity and cooperation. While advocating different forms of understanding dignified work - ranging from 'decent work' (ILO) to non-exploitative anti-capitalist forms (Ghiotto and Pascual