



BOOST DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOCIAL ECONOMY — SYNERGIES AND QUALIFYING CONTEXTS

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The social economy, as a set of entities endowed with their own characteristics, is a notion that presupposes the complexity of the social whole and is designed on the basis of a teleological criterion that embodies both a horizon that identifies it and the path that best allows it to be achieved. To this extent, the entities that compose it, being embedded in the social whole, are inscribed in it as parcelled dynamics of the historical process.

Valuing the social economy as an autonomous whole is also, to a large extent, an analytical expedient that allows us to better understand, not only in itself, but also in its insertion in the historical process. It can be viewed synchronically as a crystallized image of a conjuncture, as a transversal projection of a circumstance. But this perspective is only fruitful, combined with a diachronic approach capable of traversing its history from its roots to its horizon. In fact, the future

density of this horizon will depend a lot on its past and its scope. In short, a diachronic vision of the social economy is a permanent questioning of its insertion in the historical process.

1.2. The historical process is a globalizing dynamic, evolution of a totality that reflects the movement of several plots. To that extent, in order to understand the evolution of each one of them, it makes no sense to look at the whole as if it were immutable. Therefore, we think of the social economy as evolutionary dynamics within the framework of a society in motion. A society in motion involves a multiplicity of conceptual regions or sociocultural strata, some more superficial, more circumstantial, others deeper, more structural. If we disregard the quotidian too much we may be forgetting life, if we do not value the constancy of what is structuring we will hardly understand the meaning and significance of the deeper social dynamics.

Therefore, if the transformation of society towards more ambitious levels of collective happiness and well-being does not value the structural as decisive, it will hardly succeed, it will hardly involve the socio-economic areas in which the future of humanity is truly at stake. In this way, it will hardly be inscribed in the horizon of sought-after transformation, the overcoming of the capitalist mode of production, as an emancipatory and liberating plan, which will mean a clear renunciation of a truly effective and future involvement in the historical process.

It is in this context that the understanding of the social economy implies its insertion in the historical becoming, which presupposes its insertion in capitalism as a factor of acceleration of its metamorphosis or, in a minimalist view, as compensation for its most corrosive predatory drive.

1.3. By observing the social economy as an aspect of the global historical process, therefore, allows us to understand its specificity in the light of its role in the evolution of society. On the other hand, the historical process, being in itself an evolution, can be read as a succession of phases linked by novelties and survivals, by synergies and conflicts. The main identifying vector of its current phase is the capitalist nature of the dominant mode of production. It is projected into collective dynamics through a struggle between drives for conservation and transformation.

On the one hand, it tends to align those who benefit from the inequality inherent in capitalism; on the other hand, who suffers it as unjust and predatory. To the former tend to be added those who are predominantly determined by the impregnation of the conservative ideology inherent to capitalist hegemony; to the latter tend to be added those who opt for an anti-capitalist theoretical and doctrinal position, aimed at the institution of a post-capitalist hegemony.

Thus, the social economy is inscribed in the historical process as non-conformism, in counterpoint to capitalist logic. It can express this in two ways: either by limiting its potentialities, by limiting itself to a compensatory attitude; or by expanding it, by assuming a clear will to overcome it.

1.4. At the same time, viewing the social economy metaphorically as a galaxy helps to better understand it as a totality, without disregarding its structural heterogeneity, its diversity as sociocultural landscape. It also makes it possible to value the interaction between the types of energy that drive it, thinking of it as a field of forces whose dynamics are enhanced by the obedience of its protagonists to a set of values and principles.

This understanding, however, can only approach the fullness if it values the inscription of the social economy in the historical process, in the development of the social whole. How to conceive it? As an evolution in the constancy of the currently dominant mode of production, capitalism? Or as a maturing that contributes to a qualitative mutation, to a transformation in the deepest identity of this mode of production, that is, to its metamorphosis?

The choice for this last way to be fruitful must take into account that the current epoch corresponds to a mature phase of capitalist development that inscribes in the horizon of possible the need for its overcoming. And this need has as another face the risk of intrinsic rot or a social collapse, if the desired metamorphosis is blocked or frustrated.

The social economy is involved in this issue, it is one of its aspects, but it naturally coexists with other aspects of the social whole. It is integrated into it through various spaces and dynamics with which it weaves synergies and complementarities, thus generating contexts and impulses that qualify it.

Therefore, the social economy as part of the social whole is integrated into it, interacting with the other parts. This is how multiple synergies are created that enhance and qualify social development. Sometimes these synergies are projected as driving forces throughout the social economy, other times it puts it in connection with specific social processes, or with related social phenomena. They stimulate and qualify the social economy, but they also all benefit from these synergies.

It is by intensifying its own dynamics and synergies in which it is involved, as well as by increasing its level of insertion in larger significant contexts, that the social economy asserts itself as one aspect

of social development. This development has as its horizon a mutation of the current type of society, its qualitative transformation that can, as we have seen, be metaphorically described as a metamorphosis. In fact, it is one of the active elements of this metamorphosis leading to a post-capitalist horizon. It is to this extent that it also participates in the struggle for a new hegemony, especially as a resistance to capitalist hegemony.

Therefore, the social economy tends to inscribe itself in a historical narrative that projects it in time as a possible emancipatory horizon, liberating and humanising, thus applying for a future dominant historical role or its sharing. And the closer it gets to it, the better it resists capitalist hegemony, either in theory or in practice, which largely depends on the counter-hegemonic effectiveness it achieves.

1.5. The historical process is global. It includes, as we have seen, the evolution of the social economy and more or less intense synergies are established between some of its parts and its dynamics. Between some of them and the social economy there are especially relevant connections. At the same time, some of the driving forces of the historical process that contribute decisively to its irradiation are part of the social economy. Thus, a multifaceted space is generated that articulates the social economy with the social whole. A space whose dynamics is combined with the social economy itself, as a fruitful context that enhances its irradiation, partially drawing the profile and inducing some aspects of its content.

The maturing of the social economy, which is still ongoing, started from a circumstance in which it, being a reality in itself, did not see itself as such. But if today it is certain that, at least in some countries, such as Portugal, it recognises itself as a differentiated and autonomous space, neither its design nor its content has yet been completely stabilised.

Is it a sum of entities and social practices that conceive themselves as parts of a wider reality, inducing their own identity? Or is it an analytical device, destined to think about a part of the social whole with specific characteristics capable of generating its own identity? Or does it combine the two aspects?

Is it worth mainly as a synchronic notion that projects the image of a historical circumstance? Or is it mainly a diachronic notion that projects into the future the dynamics of a past that it recognises?

Does it settle down in the capitalist context as a part that only aspires to contribute to its balance and, in this way, to its perpetuity, to its eternalisation? Or is it inscribed in a historical trajectory that points to its overcoming?

Does it affirm itself as a convergent and complementary energy of the dominant capitalist logic, with a stabilising, stable and subordinate vocation? Or does it imbue its subordination with an anti-hegemonic resistance pervaded by an unequivocal systemic alternativeness?

Does it articulate with capitalism as a potentiator of its self-propelling historical narrative and enduring historical narrative? Or does it assume an alternative narrative of its own that integrates it into a logic of overcoming capitalism?

It is this logic of overcoming capitalism that leads the social economy to interact more intensely with other dynamics and move in various contexts that enhance its dynamics, also translating into the enrichment of the instruments of analysis that are provided to us.

1.6. To conclude this introduction, it is worth remembering that it is a powerful tool for analysing and understanding society to opt for the perspective that sees it as a combination of instances, the most relevant of which are the economic, legal-political and ideological spheres. Within each of them, spaces, dynamics, and institutions multiply and interact, which can also be resonances shared by more than one of the aforementioned instances.

Likewise, it helps to understand the social economy by assessing its role in the spaces, dynamics, and institutions through which the above-mentioned bodies are woven. We will thus better understand what can potentiate or constrain it, stimulating or blocking its contribution to global development. In fact, the articulation of these two spaces is through a complex fabric of synergies, clarifying contexts, normative vectors.

The social economy thus plays an important role in the metamorphosis of overcoming capitalism, in which it is integrated into a position of subordination, driven by endogenous energies that dynamize it. Its development is thus stimulated by synergies and enhanced by contexts that activate its protagonism in the historical process.

2. THE REFORMISM AND THE SOCIAL ECONOMY

2.1. There is a deep synergy between the social economy and reformism. In fact, its development process depends on its quantitative irradiation and the meaning of its qualitative mutability, as well as on the links it establishes with society and the degree of influence it has on it. For this reason, it is clear that the success of this process can be evaluated mainly by the extent to which the social economy reduces its subordinate position, strengthens its resistance and demonstrates its alternativity in the face of the logics and forces currently prevailing in capitalist societies.

In this way, it is understandable that only a reformist dynamic of transformation of society can successfully incorporate the process of development of the social economy, not only enhancing it, but also taking advantage of it. Only a process that gives rise to a metamorphosis of the current type of society towards a post-capitalism, due to its gradualism and its complexity, can harmoniously and completely accommodate the evolutionary and multifaceted dynamics of the social economy.

On the contrary, it is by its very nature not a decisive player in any process leading to an abrupt political and social break. This does not prevent it from being very useful in resisting authoritarian drifts or in mitigating the effects of social or environmental catastrophes.

In turn, the transformation process that we are referring to would lose one of its most virtuous and strongest impulses, if it did not involve the involvement of the social economy. Such as this cannot truly develop in the absence of a reformist process of social transformation, potentially leading to a metamorphosis of the current type of society.

2.2. Reformism, as a globally transformative qualitative dynamic of society, harmoniously welcomes and enhances the role of the social economy in the historical process, making it more fruitful. This protagonism is especially driven by public policies designed to promote and stimulate it. However, these policies, which are decisive in helping to structure a path and to provide a reference framework with clear strategic signals, are an enrichment of the life of social economy organisations and not their substitute.

The social economy is, therefore, a factor or an instance of social development, which is seen as a process whose horizon is the mutation of the type of society in which we live, that is, its metamorphosis. It is a relevant factor of this metamorphosis, by reinforcing the emancipatory and anticipatory logic of resistance to capitalism. It is not dispensable as a component of any socially

rooted reform process. Therefore, it is a context that enhances the social economy, which reciprocally cannot without damage be forgotten in any of them.

3. DEMOCRACY AND THE SOCIAL ECONOMY

3.1. Democracy as a principle with strong normative resonance structurally permeates the social economy, being also the qualifying atmosphere of the daily life of the entities that embody it.

In fact, it can only breathe freely in a democratic society. Only democracy is a context really suited to its full development. It can, therefore, be considered as a structuring and qualifying element of its organizations and their practices, being, in a way, its sap. Without it, the latter is incomplete, hampered. In some of its parts, where this lack is felt more, there is an increased risk of mischaracterization and withering.

Conversely, the democratic quality of a society improves with the expansion of the social economy. Its irradiation favours and deepens democracy, reinforcing it insofar as it makes it permeate more intensely the social fabric, projecting itself in all its institutions and organisations.

3.2. The transition process leading to an emancipatory post-capitalism implies a global democratic intensification and a growing prominence of the social economy. It is as if democracy, without ceasing to be a canon, is increasingly becoming an indispensable day-to-day experience of the social economy, which, in turn, can only blossom fully in a democratic society.

4. LOCAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE SOCIAL ECONOMY

4.1. Approaching a country's economy from a territorial perspective makes it possible to better identify asymmetries between regions and combat them, opening the door to a more balanced and fairer society. The core of this fight is local development. Its effectiveness and success depend on the intensity of the energy that animates it and its degree of irradiation. To this extent, by being a fight against territorial inequality, it is a resistance of the communities that suffer the most from the territorial imbalance, of the victims of this structural injustice.

As relevant expressions of the civic life of the members of these communities, social economy organizations are among their most reliable protagonists. In fact, they express the same civic

localism, sharing a qualifying involvement in the daily life of the regions concerned. On the other hand, there is an objective impossibility of relocating almost all these entities.

And not only are social economy organisations particularly reliable partners in local development, but local development is also a particularly welcoming and stimulating context for the social economy which, by becoming involved in it, flourishes. It is not exaggerated to say that each of these two poles will only be completely fruitful in cooperation with the other, involving the other.

4.2. This general picture of the structuring trends of this synergy is not intended to underestimate the differences between the processes of urban root and those of rural matrix, the particularities of the peripheries of the great urban centers, or even the supranational or even universal initiatives. It only draws attention to the decisive role of the synergy between the social economy and local development as a decisive factor in the progress of a country.

This relevant synergy between the two spaces occurs through the mediation of the peripheral State, with its involvement, that is, as a leading role of local power. Thus, a space of porosity is generated between the social fabric and the more peripheral political-administrative instances, more rooted in it.

This osmosis is one of the manifestations of the evolution of the Social State as a predominantly synchronic reality towards a State of Social Transformation as a fundamentally diachronic process. The social economy is part of it as a driving energy and qualifying component. Conversely, it is increasingly strengthened by this virtuous public contamination.

5. THE ECOLOGICAL BALANCE AND THE SOCIAL ECONOMY

5.1. The resonance of the ecological dimension of social life intensifies, becoming increasingly complex. The problem of environmental sustainability thus becomes denser, driven by scientific progress, the strengthening of ecological control mechanisms, and the worsening of the degradation of the quality of life. The defence of ecological balance has been joined by the fight against the consequences of climate change and even the difficult struggle for its reversal.

5.2. The core of the identity of the social economy places it in counterpoint with the dominant automatism in current capitalist societies, induced by the paroxysm of profit and submission to a logic of extended reproduction of capital. In fact, the environmental degradation thus induced,

generating a systemic ecological crisis that calls into question the survival of humanity, has led to an atmosphere of alarm in which the defence of environmental balance and the containment of climate change have become an objective priority for the human species.

Endogenously, expressing its own logic, the development of the social economy has entered into synergy with this priority. In fact, the entities that integrate it are not fully absorbed by a logic of profitable monetization and the reproduction of capital. They use it as an instrument, they do not allow themselves to be instrumentalized by it. Therefore, let it be insisted, they are not under the direct and unrestricted scope of the predatory automatisms of capitalism.

5.3. In short, harmonious integration into the environment as a balancing factor is a core aspect of the social economy. Its acceptance of the ecological issue enriches environmental safeguarding and makes it natural that ecological balance proves to be one of its most relevant elements.

Thus, it is understood that environmental predation, when led by entities of the social economy, is increasingly unbearable and that the centrality of the ecological issue in its life is an index of its modernity. Incorporating environmental sustainability in the objectives of social economy organisations has structural resonance, it is a synergy that does not burden or constrain them, it enhances them.

6. WORK AND THE SOCIAL ECONOMY

6.1. Let us see as the basic structure of the production process the combination, in complementarity and counterpoint, of capital and work. Capitalism is the dominant mode of production in today's societies, essentially translating into the predominance of the logic of extended reproduction of capital through profit. All of it works, predominantly, as an instrument of this logic to which it tends to subordinate itself. To this end, it instrumentalises labour by viewing it as a commodity and disregarding everything that transcends the problematic of its exchange value, especially that involving its use value. However, it is surrounded by forces that resist this dominant logic, and spaces of resistance with a vocation for alternativity subsist within it, where other logics persist. One of them is the social economy.

6.2. Contrary to the currently dominant ideology, the entities of the social economy in their diversity are impregnated by an atmosphere of valorisation and dignification of work. This relative

prominence necessarily leads to a secondaryization of capital and its limitation to the role of an instrument.

Therefore, everything that in the social economy means a reduction of work to a commodity is an injury to its deepest identity, its genetic code. It is not a drive for rationality, it is an ideological enquiry. It is not a response to a call from reality, it is an ethical disqualification.

At the same time, if work is a resonance of humanity, an affirmation of humanism, the social economy is especially prevented in itself, by its very nature, from looking at it with contempt for it. To this extent, the social economy also represents a path towards a growing prominence of labour in the face of capital, its decommodification. This path incorporates an attentive and persistent renunciation of the predominance of the logic of capital in society as a whole.

This dignified appreciation of work is a principle with the omnipresence of an atmosphere. But the immediacy of the concrete, of practice, is not dispensed with. If it were reduced to a mere pious vow, it would be nullified. Therefore, it must always be worthily remunerated, protected from randomness by the public sphere, have its creativity stimulated and its social fruitfulness guaranteed, as well as its humanising potential as an activity and as an achievement.

In conclusion, the social economy has the structuring vocation of being an antidote against the instrumentalization of work by capital, a resistance to its commodification. As it is perfected, a humanistic attitude in the face of work is strengthened as resistance of the humanism of living work to the domain of dead work, capital.

7. SOCIAL ECONOMY, EDUCATION, AND CULTURE

7.1. There is a tripolar synergy that involves the social economy, education, and culture. In fact, everything that in the historical process is a resonance of the development of the social economy dynamically interacts with education and culture, projecting itself on the horizon with robustness and fecundity. This interaction is necessarily marked by the crisis of mature capitalism that has deepened in recent decades, making it increasingly likely that the Soviet collapse was much less a sign of capitalism's strength than a dramatic episode in the unravelling of blocked illusions that could no longer be seen as possible and desirable images of the future. Thus, it has completely ceased to make sense to accept the imprisonment of the notion of socialism in this space of blocked illusions.

Not ignoring its frustrations and ills, but demolishing the walls that surround its utopias, it is time to summon all the controversies that were the flesh of dreams and flowers of thought, sufferings and glories, and reanimate socialism as the breath of the future. Without dogmas, without complacency with the bureaucracies of the imagination, without sanctifications or excommunications, without the fatigue of flat ideas. Let us make socialism a morning that awakens.

The tripolar space delimited by the synergies mentioned above contributes decisively to the consistency of this design.

7.2. The social economy is a diversified web of entities and practices which, through collective action, enhance the humanity of its individual protagonists, imbuing it with a cooperative solidarity expressed in a life that is worthwhile in itself, but whose fruits do not cease to be decisive for social development.

Education is a process of humanization of society, of integration of humans into society, by transforming them through knowledge and acquisition of know-how, in a living symbiosis of wisdom, information, and experience. It can be the result of institutionally rooted practices (formal education) or the sedimentation of competencies generated by other social and cultural practices, that is, by life (informal education). As a sociocultural construction of the human condition, it matures and qualifies it.

Culture is the substance of our vision of the world, life and history, tending to generate an informed understanding of the real, an emotional, rational and symbolic insertion in the communities to which one belongs. It is, therefore, a self-knowledge of the human condition, a symbolic fusion of human consciousness with the historical process, a symbiosis of rationality, emotion and amazement, a resonance of artistic, scientific and literary thought, an emancipatory curiosity that humanises us.

Once it has passed its most elementary founding levels, education reaches its true robustness by imbuing itself with a permanent potential for cultural enrichment. And culture asserts a maximum of virtuous energy, when it manages to be the free breath of the most ostensible fruits of education.

The social economy incorporates a wide range of educational and cultural entities, initiatives and practices. On the other hand, both are a factor of robustness and stimulus for the former. In fact,

the cultural and educational enrichment of social economy organizations allows them to qualify themselves as social protagonists.

7.3. The social economy, as has already been said, represents a cooperative and solidary impregnation of collective action and is a humanizing and emancipatory contribution to the post-capitalist horizon. It is also an expression of alternativity opposed to the hegemony of capitalist logic, the dominant matrix in today's societies. A fusion of several processes that have been generating the constellations that integrate it, it inscribes itself in the historical process as one of its relevant regions.

As education is a process of integrating humans into society through their transformation through knowledge and the acquisition of knowledge, in a combination of wisdom and experience, it can be the result of an institutionally supported dynamic or the result of a sedimentation of competences. It may be predominantly formal, but it can also be the fruit of life itself in society. As a sociocultural construction of the human condition, it matures and qualifies it.

Culture can also be the result of synergistic individual protagonisms or of an institutionally and organizationally constructed collective action. In this case it is common to be conveyed by entities of the social economy.

8. EPILOGUE

The development of the social economy is a resonance of the historical process in which it is integrated, necessarily impregnated by its current phase. Therefore, the conquest of an identity by the social economy, by becoming aware of itself as a whole — a social economy for itself and not just in itself — implies a specific vision of the historical process that makes possible its involvement in it.

Within the framework of the valorisation of this perspective, it is necessary to give centrality to the understanding of the essence of capitalism (currently dominant mode of production), its historical crisis, as well as the extent to which the social economy is an active force contributing to the metamorphosis of capitalism towards a society of transition to a virtuous and emancipatory post-capitalism.



It is in this context that the development of the social economy fits into the historical process in synergy with a democratically impregnated transformative reformism, in symbiosis with an ecologically qualified local development, in a humanising fusion with work, education and culture.

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