

Intervention of Yasin Sancak from the initiative BBOM at Izmir at the “The Solidarity Economy in Turkey: First Meetings between Actors and Researchers” Conference, December 14, 2020

English Translation of the “BBOM” Podcast

Hello everyone! It is very exciting to be here. I will try to summarize everything in 10 minutes. For me, BBOM is a civil movement of educators and parents who have taken action to find solutions to the educational problems in our country. I will try to share a little of its history and what we are doing as the solidarity economies in Izmir.

BBOM kicked off in 2005. It was the dream of two university students. These students organized an Alternative Education Symposium and invited alternative schools around the world. This movement then evolved into the founding of the Alternative Education Association in 2007. But it was mainly focused on academic work such as seminars and publications.

In 2009, those friends from academia whose kids were now of school age said to themselves, “What are we going to do? Education in the country is wedged between public education and private schools. How can we save the children from this ‘mangle’? “. They started to come together, and these rallies continued with the participation of the Alternative Education Association. An appeal has been launched. Following this call, the BBOM association was created in 2009. Within the time new questions appeared: “Can we open a school? What should these schools be like? Can we find alternative financing solutions?”.

After 4 years of dealing with these questions, it evolved into a 4 main axis model, which today we call the BBOM model. These 4 axes are ecology, democracy, alternative education practices, and authentic/free financing. Since we have little time, I will not go into details, but we are talking about an education model in which children can directly experience democracy, include it in their own learning life, get in touch with nature in abundance and learn by following their curiosities. Its financial pillar is defined by a non-profit structure and schools that rely on the status of education cooperatives.

First, Mutlu Keçi (the happy goat) primary school was opened in Bodrum in 2013. Of course, it was a very important step, it is a great courage for families to come together and to open such an alternative educational institution. Thanks to them, other families quickly began to come together and organize in other provinces. In 2015, after Bodrum, the first schools started to open in Ankara and Izmir. Then, the opening of a second establishment followed in Istanbul, Eskişehir, Çanakkale, and Izmir respectively. After kindergarten, primary schools started to open. Of course, there were also problems and failures during this time. We will talk about it too.

What disappointed us the most was that our first school, Mutlu Keçi, had to close in 2017, followed by the closure of Çanakkale school two years after it opened.

In other words, to summarize BBOM very briefly, we are talking about a structure that started with 17 children and 7 employees in 2013, and today, we are talking about a structure that now has 5 schools, 310 children, and 70 employees. across the country. I'm

not sure if Professor Ali Nesin is there, but to recap those 7 years, I always use an e-mail he sent, an e-mail he sent about 5- 6 years ago... He said at the time, "Well, let me tell you. When you first told me about it, I didn't think you would be successful either, but I'm so glad I had been wrong."

I still remember this e-mail because it shows us that BBOM is a structure that has evolved quite well starting from the period when it was only questioned as: "it can be done in Turkey / it cannot be done..."

After talking about BBOM from a general perspective, I would like to move on a bit to the BBOM cooperative in Izmir and what is being done here. In 2013, families started coming together in Izmir for the first time. Within a year, we created our education cooperative. A year later, we opened our kindergarten. Our school started with 10-12 children and after the first year, 2 children graduated. The following year they were 10. The families wanted to continue and said they wanted to open a primary school. Of course, this was a very difficult process because there were almost no resources.

At that time, fundraisers were carried out. The board took enormous financial and moral responsibility and we opened our elementary school on the same campus. Two pre-fabricated buildings were immediately added, plus the donation of a container where one of our classes started. We moved our kindergarten to these buildings and started using our old building as a primary school.

The number of children, which was 12 at that time, first increased to 30, 60, 90 and now we are at 150 children. This time we were cramped on our small campus. In 2020, we, therefore, moved our kindergarten to our new campus. This time, we were lucky enough to be able to build a wooden building, as we had imagined. If I get the chance, I'll share the photos. In short, the Izmir cooperative is a structure that has grown from 11 partners to 154 partners.

Here, on one hand, we try to provide education for the children of our cooperative partners, but on the other hand, we work for the public good. We are aware that we can only remedy educational problems in a very limited way by opening schools linked to the cooperative. This is why the BBOM association and cooperatives frequently work together. In Izmir, we trained 120 teachers for free in two areas where we are strong, namely education through nature and democratic practices in the classroom and school.

When we ask cooperative members and employees why they are part of the Izmir cooperative, they give 6-7 reasons. The fact that the cooperative and the school is child-centered, has an ecological approach, that it offers scholarships to children in different economic conditions, and the fact that it is a cooperative school is some of the points that attract people. Solidarity between employees, taking care of children and employees is also one of the reasons people are here.

The fact that the school provides education through nature and the forest is also one of the reasons for this preference. And, of course, supporting and using alternative education models in the face of dissatisfaction with existing education is also an important reason.

As for the main failures or challenges we face and the solutions we are trying to bring to them I can say that the first start-up period is very difficult. There is a lot of hesitation or abstention from members both on the educational structure and on financial sustainability. Of course, this abstention creates a problem for a cooperative that will only be stronger with participation, because it reduces it.

Once again, it is important to find a balance between the involvement and intervention of partners. It seems to be a difficult area. Cooperatives are democratic structures, but there have been times when we have had difficulty living through concepts such as democracy, understanding, common sense, cooperation, perhaps because of the habituations in our society from which we came.

There were times when the people who took charge of the work were exhausted. Conflicts, arguments... Another difficulty is that in all BBOM co-ops there have been intense parent interventions and tiring processes for teachers and employees due to the educational concerns I mentioned above, but all of them have been overcome. These were important learnings.

We have understood that it is necessary to define clear mechanisms for the functioning of the processes. We can then proceed more easily.

I can also talk about managerial weaknesses. Our cooperatives are evolving structures whose number of partners and managers is constantly changing. And that creates some weakness in terms of corporate identity and continuity. Financial fragility is another point. Small crises can be not resolved by the cooperative because they do not start with a certain social capital.

Likewise, it can be said that we have difficulty finding support and reaching local authorities. This may be due to our inability to explain ourselves properly. On the other hand, there is very productive volunteering support, but we cannot always use this volunteering effectively. We sometimes find it difficult to manage the human resources of volunteers.

I think there is also a problem of prevalence and access, which is to say that it does not seem very possible that this model becomes mainstream by opening schools everywhere or that families are opening them. This is why trying to disseminate the principles that BBOM values by targeting teachers in Turkey as much as possible seem to be the best strategy.

BBOM Association has undertaken this mission. He regularly leads teacher training courses. And as much as we wish we could, we can't always reach everyone. We are a private school affiliated with the National Education and on the other hand, we have a commercial activity.

Finally, I would like to talk about solidarity mechanisms.

One of the most important solidarity mechanisms is finding scholarships, and 1 in 10 children study in BBOM schools with a scholarship. The scholarships are distributed at different rates.

I can say that the support mechanisms offer a lot across the areas of activity and expertise of the partners. To give an example, designers and architects provide support in different kinds of work, partners who are in the printing industry manage the printing process.

While meeting the material needs of the school, the support of partners, the tasks they undertake during the construction and landscaping processes create serious mechanisms of solidarity and create a strong spirit of unity. Once again, we can talk about the financial support provided by the partners. By doing this work, that is to say by opening the first two schools, by making new constructions, we especially preferred to proceed by borrowing from our partners.

The pandemic period has been quite difficult for many families. At that time, we had families who were struggling to pay. Some of our partners continued their payments and provided this support. It should be noted that the pandemic period, the periods when schools are closed, is very trying, especially for kindergartens.

It must be said that half of our children are in kindergarten. But during the first lockdown, none of our families broke up. By trying to make their payments one way or another, they protected those first affected in times of crisis - the employees - and kept the co-op afloat.

Another solidarity mechanism is the free training that we provide outside. We try to offer free training especially to employees in the public sector and to those who work with children in local government.

To wrap up, another point that I find important in BBOM İzmir cooperative is that of "Entrepreneurial Partnership" (or venture partnership).

Entrepreneurship partners are those partners who aim to do business, produce in areas appropriate to the purpose and activity of the cooperative. The cooperative acts in fact as an incubation centre here. It supports these initiatives. This increases both its awareness and visibility and can get a share of the profits. So more children can benefit from scholarships.

There are 4 partnerships. One of them is the food community within the cooperative which has existed for 2.5 years. It works very well and helps provide healthy food for families.

There are also training workshops aimed at teachers. Again, the basic principle is social utility. While workshops and similar training are quite expensive, we try to reach teachers with affordable fees. And then the activities in nature with the children and the art workshops.

Thank you.