

S4.4: Incubation of Local Solidarity Based Economy Networks: a Brazilian innovative experience

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INTRODUCTION

Eradicating extreme poverty, reducing disease, ensuring adequate shelter and addressing the issue of social exclusion are some of the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations Millennium Declaration signed by all the world's countries and the world's leading development institutions in 2000 with a deadline of 2015. (www.un.org) Meeting such challenging goals requires the collaboration of many different actors including government, businesses, non-governmental organizations, universities and civil society. Huge sums of money are invested in socioeconomic programs and projects every year. Concerning the private sector, companies invest billions of dollars a year in their social and environmental responsibility programs. How can we maximize the impact of such investments in the generation of sustainable socioeconomic development? This paper presents an innovative alternative led by the Federal University of Bahia, Brazil: the incubation of local Solidarity Economy Networks.

Etzkowitz (2002) claims that incubators are hybrid organizations that exemplify the triple helix model of university-industry-government relations with significant implications for the university's role in society. He argues that incubation strengthens the university's third mission: the promotion of economic and social development.

The first incubators in Brazil date from mid-1980s. Since then, the Brazilian incubator movement has developed rapidly: according to the National Association of Entities for Promoting Innovative Enterprises - Anprotec, there were over 370 incubators in Brazil in 2006. The movement has gained support from universities, government and industry associations. Its potential to contribute to social economic development has made it a subject of public policy both at federal and state levels.

Although most Brazilian incubators focus on the private sector, i.e. on firm-formation, the scope of this movement in Brazil has grown broader and several types of incubators have emerged to respond the local conditions, opportunities and problems. In Brazil, incubators mentor not only high tech firms, but also low-technology firms, non-governmental organizations, cooperatives and, most recently, solidarity based economy networks, as the case presented here.

Incubation in the field of Solidarity based Economy (SE) in Brazil has traditionally focused on the development of popular cooperatives, such as the pioneer Technological Incubator of Popular Cooperatives - ITCP /COPPE/UFRJ in Rio de Janeiro, started in the late 1990s. In 2009, there were 130 ITCP linked to two national networks in Brazil: Unitrabalho and Rede de ITCP. (FRANÇA FILHO E CUNHA, 2009) The ITCP movement has been greatly fostered by the National ITPC Support Program - Proninc of the Brazilian Ministry of Labour, started in 2004.

The School of Administration of the Federal University of Bahia – EAUFBA (www.adm.ufba.br) has had a well-known tradition of research on Social Technologies having created an Interdisciplinary Center of Social Development and Management - CIAGS (www.gestaosocial.org.br), the first of its kind in Brazil. Solidarity Economy is one of its areas of expertise. The researchers from EAUFBA Department of Local Power and Organizational Studies – NEPOL have developed a methodology for the incubation of local solidarity economy networks and created the Technological Incubator of Solidarity Economy and Territory Development Management –

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ITES/UFBA. The ITES/UFBA was institutionalized as an UFBA extension program in 2008. ITES/UFBA is firmly embedded in the research and teaching missions of the university and is part of its effort to foster regional economic and social development by taking knowledge out of the university into society.

Solidarity based Economy Networks - SEN can be understood as a complex cooperation strategy for local development based on the promotion of production and commercialization circuits inside the considered region. The Networks create a new model of economic regulation in which the offer is planned according to the demands previously identified by the communities involved in the solidarity based economy dynamic. Ethical consumption, fair trade, solidarity based finances, free technologies and self-managed production are some concepts related to this proposal. The incubation of Solidarity based Economy Networks focuses mainly on low income communities. (FRANÇA FILHO E CUNHA, 2009)

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In this paper, we present two initiatives under ITES/UFBA coordination: the Eco-Luzia and the Ecosmar projects. The Eco-Luzia project was selected because it was the incubator pilot project, which led to the incubator institutionalization. The Ecosmar project is the first and so far the only initiative financed by a multi-national organization as part of its Social Responsibility Policy, an innovation for both the company and the university involved in the experience. The two cases seem to reveal a dynamic Triple Helix Twins logic where (i) the society demands compensation for the social, economic and environmental impacts of the industrial activity in the focus area (most of the time, this demand is latent, not organized); (ii) university develops social technology; (iii) industry identifies at the university expertise an opportunity to optimize its interaction with the society; and (iv) government creates new institutions to regulate the new practices.

The authors of this paper are convinced that the discussion of the ITES/UFBA experience greatly contributes to the understanding of a different kind of U-I-G linkage for socioeconomic development based on a non-market logic which may be replicated in other contexts around the world. Although the relation between SE initiatives and capitalist organizations is controversial for SE researchers, it seems relevant to point out that the ITES/UFBA proposal has been considered a potentially effective alternative to optimize private investments in Social Responsibility.

After this short introduction, this article comprises six other sections: (1) an abridged review of the Solidarity Economy debate; (2) incubators of SE initiatives; (3) the ITES/UFBA methodology; (4) industry support; (5) the cases; and (6) conclusion.

THE SOLIDARITY ECONOMY DEBATE

The term Solidarity based Economy (SE) refers to a different economic logic which is emerging in different parts of the world in the form of cooperative and associative initiatives led by civil society, usually related to poor communities. Such initiatives show different configurations: some of them develop their own production and consumption circuit, developing autonomous social productive chains, in some cases strongly based on non monetary relations; others engage on more permanent relations with the market and develop different kinds of partnerships with the government.

SE initiatives may have different formats according to the region or country being considered: from production and service cooperatives, community banks, exchange clubs and service associations in Latin American countries, up to social cooperatives, cooperative societies of public

interest, social enterprises or local exchange systems in European countries. In the 90s, the term came up at the same time in two very different environments: Brazil and France. (França Filho e Laville, 2004)

We argue that SE is an evolving field of practices. Our hypothesis is that its dynamic is evolving from socio-economic self-organized initiatives to social political self-organized efforts, which leads us to consider it as a peculiar kind of social movement. This idea is reinforced by the characteristics of the participating actors. Let's consider the four categories of actors or entities which compose the Solidarity based Economy field in Brazil:

- The first group represents what we call first level organizations: the solidarity economy enterprises themselves.
- The second group of actors are the supporting entities such as the incubators and the financing institutions.
- The next category, which differs significantly from the first two, refers to self-organized political initiatives such as the SE networks and forums: the Brazilian Forum of SE and local and regional SE forums.
- The fourth actor refers to new institutions set up by the government to support the SE movement: the Solidarity Economy National Secretariat subordinated to the Ministry of Labour and Employment – Senaes-MTE; the Bahia Secretariat of SE – Sesol-Setre-BA; the network of SE public policy managers and many other public entities which are working hard to write SE public policies at the state and the municipality levels. (França Filho, 2006)

INCUBATORS OF SOLIDARITY ECONOMY INITIATIVES

Incubation in the field of Solidarity Based Economy in Brazil has traditionally focused on the development of popular cooperatives – PC founded on the triple bottom line concept of sustainability, expanded by efforts to preserve local culture. The pioneer initiative was the Technological Incubator of Popular Cooperatives - ITCP/COPPE/UFRJ started in 1995 in the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. The ITCP/COPPE/UFRJ resulted from the articulation of COEP, FINEP and FBB: (i) COEP is a National Network for Social Mobilization which supports popular movements against famine and poverty all over Brazil. Being established in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1993, it was created by 30 public institutions and grew to include over 1100 organizations in 2008. Its members comprise non-governmental organizations, private-sector firms and government departments, all of them focused on promoting social justice and supporting local development initiatives (www.coeppbrasil.org.br); (ii) FINEP is the Brazilian Agency for Research and Projects Financing, subordinated to the Ministry of Science and Technology (www.finep.gov.br); and (iii) FBB is the Bank of Brazil Foundation (www.fbb.org.br) in charge of managing the bank's social function by funding social development initiatives. The ITCP/COPPE/UFRJ mission was to develop a methodology for PC incubation and diffuse it to other universities around the country.

The ITCP movement originated in the university sphere has been greatly fostered by the National ITPC Support Program – Proninc, started in 1997, having FINEP, Bank of Brazil, FBB and COEP as its signatories. In 2003, the Brazilian government created the Senaes - National Secretary of Solidarity Based Economy, subordinated to the Ministry of Labour, which took over the program and improved its actions in cooperation with three other Ministries: Education and Culture, Social Development and Health. In 2008 and 2009 alone, Proninc allocated over US\$ 10 million (non reimbursable funds) in ITCP projects through public announcement. Proninc is a consensus space where different stakeholders interact and co-create the program.

Since its very beginning, the ITCP movement has had a clear Triple Helix twins (ETZKOWITZ E ZHOU, 2006) format deriving from the combined efforts of organizations from different institutional spheres - government, university, industry, civil society and public - focusing on finding sustainable solutions for some negative consequences of the dominant capitalist mode of development (social exclusion, poverty and unemployment) which embeds the current stream of

innovation. Regarding unemployment, SE breaks with the dominant competitive-insertion mode of solution and proposes a solidarity-sustainable approach.

The university has been playing a central role in this multi-institutional effort to promote social and economic development through an alternative approach to the dominant pattern of private owned firms. The university is in charge of building and transferring social technology: on the one hand it builds up knowledge through academic studies and on the other, it helps organize the initiatives, provides technical assistance and builds capacity of the actors on self management and cooperation - two pillars of solidarity based economy. This dialogue between academic knowledge and field practice feeds the learning process and enables continuous improvement.

The government's fast move towards building the necessary institutions to foster the movement should also be highlighted as determinant for its strengthening. In addition, the interaction facilitated by the networked nature of the solidarity based economy movement in Brazil (the ITPC networks, Coep and the FBES - Solidarity Based Economy National Forum) tends to (i) accelerate knowledge exchange and production and (ii) increase link density between actors, which contribute to consolidating the movement.

Despite these positive points, the ITCP movement also faces some barriers and difficulties, the most impeding being the lack of a permanent support for the university incubators: the absence of an exclusive budget for the incubator in the university annual budget condemns the incubator to live under its own capacity to capture resources through direct request – when an institution proposes a project – or via public announcements. This dynamic brings some degree of uncertainty and irregularity to the incubator's activities.

THE ITES/UFBA METHODOLOGY

As presented before, the ITES/UFBA originated in the School of Administration of the Federal University of Bahia. It was enabled by a long-term knowledge accumulation process in the ambit of the research programs run by NEPOL. At the moment of the research, there were six projects in progress and five new ones being contracted, which will be financed by public funds. There were about 18 people involved in these projects, including students in graduation and post-graduation courses, ex-students, professors and technicians.

The incubation of a local Solidarity Economy Network - SEN involves different socio-productive and socio-organized institutions. Since the emphasis is on the territory development, the focus goes beyond the socioeconomic organizations to include sociopolitical, environmental and cultural initiatives. Building and/or consolidating an associative dynamic in the territory is essential for the incubation process and so are public spaces as privileged sites for strengthening pre-existing social, economic and political relationships and cultural manifestations.

The ITES/UFBA methodology is inspired by the Solidarity based Economy debate and the Instituto Banco Palmas experience (a reference Community Bank operating in Ceará, Brazil, since 1998). It has four main interchangeable stages: training, researching, planning and experimenting.

Training is a permanent activity during the incubation process and comprises different levels depending on the characteristics of the local people who usually face severe educational deficits. Training includes technical skills for managing solidarity based economy initiatives, specific professional skills related to the nature of the network organizations, citizenship, associative action and solidarity based economy. The training effort focuses both on the sociability dimension and on knowledge management to build a culture of democratic and self managed work.

Researching aims at studying the socioeconomic context and the historical-cultural aspects of the territory by mapping the local production, services and consumption. The information collected is subsidiary for planning the local SEN.

Planning refers to the designing of the network and defining the initiatives and enterprises to be created and/or supported based on the research data. The definition criterion is the technical-economical and associative viability of the initiative. The planning stage focuses on reorganizing the

local economy by reorienting the offer-demand dynamic in the territory towards a new solidarity-sustainable economic development. The goal is helping the territory - a community, a section or even a municipality – collectively build its strategic plan of local development.

Experimenting is the implementation dynamic recommended by the methodology. It happens throughout the project, in parallel with the other stages. Experimenting and training are articulated actions. Some practices such as solidarity based finances (Community Bank), community information centers and some social-productive and social-cultural initiatives are essential to any SEN and therefore may be started even before the research is finished. Experimenting is part of the training effort since it helps people absorb the SEN principles through self-involvement with the project building. It's learn-by-doing.

To implement a SEN project in a territory, the first step may be the set up of a Solidarity Economy Associative Center (CAES). A CAES or any other kind of local representative entity must be legally institutionalized, since the informal initiatives which may sprout within the project need legal support.

A CAES is founded on four pillars: an associative nature; information technology facilities; an initiative of solidarity based finances, such as a Development Community Bank; and a cooperative nucleus. A CAES is a space for the community social political self organization, a public space of proximity (LAVILLE, 2008), fundamental for the learning and practice of local democracy. It may also house educational activities of different kinds and levels: technical-professional, general knowledge in Solidarity Economy, citizenship, environmental education, conscious consumption etc.

The Community Bank helps disseminate a solidarity based financial system in the territory, which comprises popular solidarity-based microcredit for financing local production, services and consumption, and other practices such as social currency and community saving.

The information technology center is of extreme importance to consolidate the network. It promotes digital inclusion and offers technological support for the diagnostic research of the local socioeconomic reality (part of the ITES/UFBA methodology). It also facilitates the interaction between the local network and other networks, which stimulates commercial relations, knowledge exchange and institutional articulations. The information technology center is also an instrument for the management of the local SE network information, either used for communication purposes or for building and storing a database of the residents' social professional profiles.

The cooperative nucleus is the genesis *locus* of the productive groups which constitute some of the main knots of the local network, according to this methodology.

The methodology includes permanent monitoring and evaluation of the network activities throughout the implementation and the consolidation phases. This system supports the desincubation process.

In resume, the incubation of local SE networks according to the ITES/UFBA methodology involves the reorganization of the local economy as the base for the emergence of a different economy. The starting point is to mobilize and capacitate the local actors, who are soon engaged in a public discussion of the common problems, which is done together with the diagnostic of the territory socioeconomic situation. Then, there is support for the community to plan and experiment the creation of activities (offer) which match the genuine demands identifies in the public forum of discussion.

INDUSTRY SUPPORT

ITES/UFBA projects have brought together university, government, industry and poor communities to co-create local sustainable solutions to improve the community living conditions. Industry has been an important partner of the projects; they have seen ITES/UFBA proposals as a viable and potentially effective alternative for driving corporate social and environmental responsibility investments.

The two ITES/UFBA projects studied in this paper show a non-trivial dialogue between two different modes of production: the capitalist mode and an alternative mode founded on solidarity. In both cases, the SEN were mainly financed by market organizations. The demand for the Eco-Luzia project came from Petrobras, the state controlled Brazilian oil company, as part of the company's

Social Responsibility program. The SEN project is a complement to a Conduct Adjustment Agreement enforced by the local public prosecutors against the company for environmental depletion. The university was invited in by Petrobras managers who knew the university expertise in Social Management and articulated the cooperation to maximize the social impact of the funds being allocated in the victimized area. It is important to highlight that Petrobras has funded social projects through public announcements for a long time: in 2010, for example, the company has announced a US\$ 65 million-fund for the company's development and citizenship program. Considering Petrobras is a state controlled company, despite being an open capital enterprise, some argue that these investments translate the fulfilling of the company's social function and find it difficult to associate them to mere capitalist interests.

The Ecosmar project, however, has been proposed and financed by a private company as part of its Social Environmental Responsibility Policy. On the company's side, such action tends to increase its market value and even the workers' productivity (the literature suggests that employees work better when there is an identification between their own values and the company's values), which would reinforce the capitalist accumulation. But on the community's and the university's sides, it is an opportunity to learn and practice a different mode of production/distribution; it opens an autonomous space to work on an alternative economic regulation logic towards a new model of social development. This dialogue between actors from ideologically different perspectives nurtures a rich debate among SE researchers. There is no simple answer.

THE CASES

All the territories incubated by ITES/UFBA are characterized by poverty, severe social exclusion and a predominant black population.

The Eco-Luzia Project

The Santa Luzia community is located in the periphery of a municipality called Simões Filho in the State of Bahia. It lies between two larger communities and is approximately 5 km from the city center. It has a population of 100 low-income families - around 500 people, most of whom face great difficulty entering the labor market due to their low level of educational. This small community presents extreme poverty aspects: limited access to essential products and services, and poor local infrastructure.

The population suffers from many health problems due to weak social sanitary conditions, which deplete the environment and the social habitat itself: the area does not have a sanitation system. One of the most visible effects is the poor quality of the water used by the population, which frequently causes severe cases of verminous diseases.

The houses are also in poor condition and at risk of collapse due to the characteristic of the soil in the area - swampland - and the lack of technical assistance during construction. In addition, the swamp itself is in an advanced stage of degradation due to the disposal of toxic residue from industrial activity. The swamp is the community's main source of income: most of the people survive from the swamp. The community lives under permanent risk of environmental contamination since it is surrounded by industrial poles.

This scenario of social exclusion is worsened by the population's social economic profile: most of the people of working age are unemployed, living from temporary sub-employment or from governmental social programs. Many families live on less than US\$ 60 a month and some of them cannot satisfy their basic nutritional needs. Concerning education, a high percentage of the population (30%) is illiterate or functionally illiterate, mainly the elderly. The most important public good is a small primary school - four classrooms, which works as the only space for the community social political organization. The most observable consequence of such a degraded social environment is low self-confidence and a limited capacity for social mobilization.

In addition, the community lacks effective local trade. There is only one small market in the area which sells few groceries at high price so people are forced to travel long distances to purchase essentials. Transportation is expensive, irregular and of poor quality: the community counts only on a few vans with no fixed schedule, which condemns them to a kind of geographical isolation. This situation is even more dramatic when health assistance is needed, since the only public health facility in the area has been closed. From what has been presented one can easily understand the huge challenges the community faces to reach a minimum level of social economic development.

A triple helix arrangement brought together ITES/UFBA (coordinator), Petrobras (the oil company), the local government and the affected community to co-create an optimal application for the resources originated both from the Conduct Adjustment Agreement - TAC and the SEN Project funded by Petrobras. The TAC resources - US\$ 160 thousand – would be invested in the construction of 23 houses. The Petrobras professionals involved in the negotiations considered this was a sub-optimal solution since it would not significantly improve the community situation of socioeconomic exclusion. Having attended courses on SE at EAUFBA, they proposed to complement the effort with an ITES/UFBA SEN project. After a year of discussions and meetings with the community representatives and other institutional partners, the Eco-Luzia project started in 2005, a pioneer experience of territory incubation in Simões Filho, Bahia, Brazil. The Eco-Luzia Project can be understood as a real Living Lab for the ITES/UFBA methodology: a test environment in which the technology is given shape in real life contexts and in which users are considered co-producers. (BALLON et al, 2005)

In the first three years of activities, the project was financed by Petrobras. From mid 2008 on it has depended on public funds captures by ITES/UFBA in public announcements at federal and state levels, which has reduced the project dynamics.

The following initiatives have been implemented: (1) the Solidarity Development Center (CDS); (2) the Community Development Bank; and (3) the Community Grocery Store. The construction of the 23 houses is expected to be finished in 2010.

The ITES/UFBA team has identified the following aspects as barriers for the project progress in the first four year: (1) the population high educational deficit; (2) the presence of an autocratic and controlling community leader; (3) a lack of synchronism between funding, the ITES/UFBA technical team dynamic, the construction pace and the community rhythm; (4) weak mobilization of the municipal government; and (5) difficulties to communicate the projects deliveries.

The Ecosmar Project

The second ES incubated territory presented in this paper is Matarandiba, a small village with less than a thousand inhabitants located on Itaparica Island, the biggest island in Todos os Santos Bay, in the metropolitan area of Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. Resembling Santa Luzia, Matarandiba has weak infrastructures: electricity supply, sanitation service and garbage collection are precarious. In addition, the community has been facing growing environmental depletion caused both by seasonal tourist activities and by predatory fishing. At high season, the population grows significantly and the process of depletion is worsened due to inadequate infrastructure, lack of education and environmental consciousness.

The community lies on a swampy area and the local economy is based on fishing, part of which is done destructively with the use of explosives. Despite its great importance for the community, this activity does not generate enough employment or income for the population that suffers from the lack of local working alternatives, especially for the youngsters. Regarding education, a large part of the population is semi-illiterate. There are only two public schools in the area which offer kindergarten to fourth grade level instruction, nevertheless education is of poor quality.

The SEN project started in 2007 under the coordination of ITES/UFBA and the multi-national company. During the first three years of activity, the project has been funded by the company (the largest amount), federal and state funds and the municipal government. The project is in its fourth

stage now and the following activities have been implemented: (1) Matarandiba Community Association (Cineclub; Community Radio; environmental groups; sport groups; community transportation); (2) Matarandiba Social Community Association; (3) Ilhamar Community Development Bank; (4) Infomar – Community Information Technology Center; (5) an agroecologic production group; and (6) the Matarandiba Community Development Forum New initiatives to be implemented in the next phase comprise a community bakery, a community grocery store, community-based tourism and aquiculture.

The most critical difficulties for the project progress have been (1) funding discontinuity, (2) community mobilization, (3) people's ability to appropriate new knowledge and (4) the local political culture based on personal favors and family relation.

The most relevant lessons learnt include (1) the community mobilization depends on the quality of the interaction of ITES/UFBA agent(s) and the local culture: the local cultural manifestations are important instances for community mobilization and integration; (2) collective leadership must be encouraged to guarantee the SE initiatives' continuity; (3) building new capabilities depends on continuous training effort: punctual actions are not enough; (4) interacting with and learning about other experiences is fundamental for the new members motivation.

The evaluation of the impacts of the incubation process in both experiences requires careful considerations. First of all, it is necessary to consider the weak social capital in both communities, translated by a low level of community organization and associative participation, and by the predominance of a local political culture that does not stimulate democratic and collective actions. Taking this into consideration, the learning process of a democratic political culture based on group action seems to be a relevant impact of the SEN projects: the experimenting of the collective management of socioeconomic, sociopolitical and sociocultural local initiatives which bring action to the community life. These non-economic results translate high impact. The regular operation of the local SE initiatives reveals an improvement of the community organization process and a step forwards in building group autonomy. It is relevant to understand that it is difficult to recognize expressive economic results in terms of an increase in the income level in such short periods of time due to the local pre-existing characteristics, as mentioned before. Therefore, even if we consider some important economic results mainly originated from the solidarity finances practices, which have a central role in the SEN consolidation, the main impacts of such projects in their first years are non-economic. None of the territories have been desincubated yet.

CONCLUSIONS

The ITES/UFBA methodology proposes the construction of a new kind of institutional arrangement with high potential of becoming a reference for renovated public policies concerning local development. Nevertheless, there are still many challenges to face. One of them concerns the incubation methodology itself, particularly in relation to the improvement of the didactic-pedagogic and management instruments. This improvement is necessary for the consolidation of the ITES/UFBA methodology as a reference social technology.

The other challenges refer to the lack of broad regulation concerning SE initiatives and local aspects of the incubated territories: (1) the local political scenario, which is important for building partnerships that facilitate the network activities; (2) the local history of organization; (3) the local leaders' profile; (4) the local infrastructure and (5) the resources available. All these aspects must be considered when evaluating the level of sustainability of incubation processes of this kind.

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