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NETWORKS

THAT WEAVE THE FABRIC OF DEMOCRACY AND FREEDOM

Marcos Arruda

PACS, Rio de Janeiro

RBSES-Brazilian Network on a Solidarity Socioeconomy

WSSE-Workgroup on a Solidarity Socioeconomy

When a fisherman spreads his net on the ground or on water, it extends horizontally to reach as broad an area as it possibly can. No knot is higher, better or more important than others. No knot can regard the others as competitors, adversaries or enemies. Each knot knows that, as part of the net, it is indissolubly interconnected with four other knots, each of which is connected in turn with four other knots, in an exponential progression... to make up the net.

Each knot thus knows it is responsible for itself, for the connection with its four neighbouring knots, as well as for the integrity of the net as a whole. Each knot knows that it is unique and that all the other knots are also unique. It is this diversity of knots that makes up the unity of the net. When the fisherman reflects on this marvellously simple complexity, tears of emotion roll down his face. He loves the net, because he created it, and because it is both beautiful and effective. It reflects his own marvellously simple complexity.

It is this diversity of knots that makes up the unity of the net.

It is the same with a Solidarity Economy. It involves much more than the activity of just producing to subsist. It is an art of living. A solidarity economy (*eco*=home; *nomy*=management) challenges us to manage and care for the many dwellings we inhabit during our earthly lives: the body, the household, the community, the county or municipality, the ecosystem, the country, the planet. A solidarity economy calls on each and every inhabitant to empower him/herself and become the subject of the development of his/her individual and collective potentials. Economic activity is only a means to enhance endlessly human and social development. Personal and social development is the true goal - a goal that is continually moving to new horizons, since our potentials are infinite! Development can also mean a permanent conquest of ever higher degrees of freedom: freedom from the chains of mere survival, the bonds of slave or wage labour (the job), deprivation of rights and alienation from our responsibilities as citizens and as human beings in a Universe that is also constantly moving.

A Solidarity Economy builds on the principle that no-one empowers anyone else, and no-one empowers themselves alone - rather, in order to empower yourself as a personal and a social being, you need to be consciously interconnected with others. If this interconnection is hierarchical and vertical, it will be overbearing and alienating. Only a horizontal, non-hierarchical interconnection is truly liberating. Another name for this horizontal interconnection is democracy. True democracy is like the fisherman's net: each person is fully responsible for him- or herself and for the human community as a whole, in a relationship of dynamic harmony with the environment. Relationships among people rest on cooperation, reciprocity, respect for diversity, solidarity, and the endeavour to build unanimities without harming diversity. The network is the unity of diversity.

Libertating education teaches us to go always further.

Education is liberating when it helps whoever is being educated to self-empower themselves to fulfil their responsibility for managing their own individual and social development. Libertating education teaches us to go always further. The liberating educator is one who invests knowledge and energy in teaching people how to learn, so that they can do without the educator. This vocation can be identified by its humility: a yearning for others to dispense with the educator's guidance and become autonomous while being aware of their bonds of solidarity with the educator and with everyone else. This is a yearning for other people's self-empowerment, in that one becomes a wayfarer whose steps clear the way. But it is a long, risky and winding road. A liberating education teaches not to fear risks, crises or conflict. In the midst of the diversity that is life, they are natural hardships. Learning how to deal with them not as enemies, but as allies helps us to grow and to move forwards and upwards.

In search of an attitude of impeccable humility, liberating educators want their pupils to equal and even surpass them in the three arts of being, knowing and doing. Such educators practice an education of love. And when that education serves a Solidarity Economy, it informs relations that weave social, unifying and loving content into the economy. And from love springs naturally the higher goal of our existence on Earth: a life of ever-greater fulfilment and happiness.

Marcos Arruda - Economist and educator at PACS, Rio de Janeiro, facilitator for Unipaz (International University for Peace) and fellow of the Transnational Institute, Amsterdam.

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Address: Av. Rio Branco, 277 - sala 1609 - Centro - Rio de Janeiro/RJ
CEP.: 20040-009 - Telefax: 55 21 2210-2124 - Caixa Postal: 7508 CEP: 20241-970
Website: www.pacs.org.br - E-mail: pacs@pacs.org.br

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Utilidade Pública Federal – Portaria nº 2.476, de 17 de dezembro de 2003 – Diário Oficial da União de 18/12/2003.
Utilidade Pública Estadual – Diário Oficial de 02/06/2003 – Lei nº 4.108.
Utilidade Pública Municipal – Diário da Câmara Municipal do Rio de Janeiro de 13/09/2004 – Lei nº 3832 de 09/09/2004
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Who we are

Set up in 1986, provides eco-social advisory services, socio-economic research and educational action in collaboration with social movements, cooperatives and self-managed associations, churches, municipal governments, ecumenical movement and others.

Goal

Our goal is to contribute to human self-development and to the construction of a critical and creative public opinion. It includes the promotion of transformative, participatory, technically competent public policies at local, national and global levels.

Methodology

Taking the Praxis Methodology as a foundation we work with people and organizations, for their individual and collective empowerment to become the subjects of their own history and development. Our actions unfold on three levels: the local, immediate, the meso - networking and medium-term - and the national-global and long-term.

Activities

- Research, analysis and critical thinking in the form of publications, interviews, radio programs and audio-visual materials;
- Preparing alternative proposals, policies and development projects and practicing advocacy and consultancy for their implementation;
- Advisory services and educational activities with social and ecumenical movements, municipal governments and others;
- Participation in local, national and international networks.

Partners

Ação Quaresmal (Suíça), Christian Aid (Reino Unido), DKA (Áustria), E-Changer (Suíça), Ford Foundation (EUA), FPH (França), Instituto Marista de Solidariedade (Brasil), SCIAF (Escócia), TRÓCAIRE (Irlanda)