

The Role of Social Economy in Refugee Crises — The Greek Example of 1922 Refugee Flows

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Abstract: The ongoing refugee crisis in conditions of capitalist globalization and economic downturn brings forward new terms for problems associated with it. To address said problems, it is essential to combine previously tested methods as well as institutional innovations.

This paper investigates the potential of drawing knowledge and experience through organizational learning, as arising from the theory and practice of Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE). In other words, it is accepted that problems must be addressed in a different manner, that includes the organizational upgrading of the “social” for settling broader “deregulations”.

Finally, we should note that the supplementary and balancing regulation method arising from SSE is of an alternative nature when compared to strategies that have been tested in the past with good results and are defined by prevailing regulating methods.

Key words: social and solidarity economy; refugee crisis; organizational learning; institutional innovation

JEL codes: N

1. Introduction

Refugee, as well as immigrant flows, as part of the rapidly increasing cross-border movement of population groups, will continue for many more years to be a key area of concern for social scientists. The current population movements are considered to be the most extensive since World War II.

The phenomenon requires a multifaceted and interdisciplinary investigation, as it refers to critical economic, social, political, demographic and cultural aspects. Due to the nature and conditions in which it evolves (given the expanding economic areas and interdependence of social formations), even if one or more of the reasons causing such phenomena disappear, it is unlikely that this will happen at the same time in all countries involved. However, even if only one of the critical parameters remains out of control, it can, under certain conditions, fuel the perpetuation and spread of refugee and migration movements. Indicatively, when examining one of the closest examples for our country, in particular one of the three main axes of the demographic policy of the European Union (the other two are related to the quality and quantity of populations) which is that of distribution and

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regulation of migration movements, we identify a long-term trend. This trend is linked to what historical demographers describe as a critical finding for two adjacent regions of the planet: Mediterranean Africa and southern Europe, where there has been a long-term estimate (1950-2025) of 500% population growth in Africa versus a meagre 20% in Europe. That is to say, if this trend alone is confirmed, even with any reassessments as to its intensity and even in the absence of other components of the problem, will exercise huge pressure at least in Mediterranean Europe (Kapsalis, 2018, p. 400).

In order to restore the condition and regardless of the expected ups and downs occurring in the evolution of the phenomenon, it is in any case necessary to have in place long-term plans and regulatory mechanisms to manage the direct and indirect effects of this development.

The task of regulating the flows in question remains complex and the efficiency of any regulatory mechanisms is usually limited, so that any realistic requirements of their operation are on the one hand the prevention and mitigation of adverse impact and on the other hand the exploitation of opportunities arising for host societies and for the societies of origin of the refugee and migration flows.

It should be clarified that the former includes natural persons forced to leave their countries of origin due to political or economic coercion or environmental disasters. According to the above, it is clear that the term “refugees” in the light of a sociological view, such as the present, is broader than the corresponding legal term, since it is not limited to people are characterized as such under international or domestic law, but refers to additional population categories.

2. The Refugee Crisis as Organization Crisis of the Social

2.1 Setting the “Refugee Crisis” on New Bases

We have already referred to a variety of justifications, especially when the study extends to medium and long term, as regards the shaping of crisis conditions.

Although we know the difficulties entailed in highlighting the causal balances between multiple causes, difficulties that are intensified by the temporary nature of these balances (Kapsalis, 2018), we will attempt to approach the refugee crisis as an organization crisis of the “social”. This is not because we overlook the scientific validity of other different types of approaches to the matter, but because the approach proposed herein is more compatible with the needs of a study that aims to explore the contribution of social and solidarity economy in regulating refugee - in the broadest sense of the term - flows, entering or passing through our country, especially after the crisis conditions were set. In specific, we argue that the conditions that have been formed are similar to those of non-equilibrium systems and their regulation requires not just remedy moves, but a new type of organization of the “social” as a whole.

In this context, it is considered necessary to mobilize regulatory mechanisms that allow the activation of civil society organizations and in particular bodies, which refer to the wider movement identified as social and solidarity economy. More specifically, we consider that the disturbed equilibrium, which is also due to the state-orientated way of organizing the “social” that was structured around the “welfare state” (Nikolopoulos & Kapogiannis, 2013), especially after the instability caused by the conditions of economic and fiscal crisis, can no longer be restored without the decisive contribution of a new way of regulating/organizing the “social”.

In this new way of regulation, which will be characterized more by “sociotropism” and less by state-centrism, the regulating of refugee flows will be done in new terms. This is true to the extent that the new regulatory

framework will be governed by a “positive sociotropism”, which will reserve an upgraded and more active role for civil society organizations in general. A role that is also connected with the possibility that includes the potential of Synergetic Social and Solidarity Economy (SSSE) organizations to mobilize “... resources that other sectors cannot, such as volunteering, solidarity, the local community and local networks” (Geormas, 2013, p. 209)

However, with a focus on such approaches it has been claimed on the one hand that what was characterized as “welfare state” is nothing more than one of the many forms of organizing the “social” and on the other hand what appears as a crisis of the “welfare state” is not but a wider structural crisis and as such it should not be treated in its narrow sense.

At the same time, we must also emphasize how much the position of individuals in society has changed. Indeed, it is very indicative and in recent years we find ourselves before an increasing amount of people living on the margins of society, while for years the spreading view was that problems such as unemployment, illness, homelessness, financial misery, have caused in part by the attitude of individuals (E.C., 2016).

It can therefore be argued that the deeper the organizational crisis of the “social” and what it entails become, the more imbalances arising from the dynamics of a generalized crisis will multiply, reinforcing the hypothesis according to which aspects of the crisis participate in a feedback process.

We can point out at least two points of imbalance that we consider important and interesting in terms of the concerns developed herein: these are the points related to the labour market and to the sphere of distribution. In fact, the first of these seems to be taking on explosive proportions during the years of the generalized crisis and as a result more and more reference is made imbalance dynamics in the labour market that tend to cause chaotic phenomena and lead, as mentioned above, to situations reminiscent of non-equilibrium systems.

2.2 From “Deregulation” to the New Organisation of the “Social”

The imbalances mentioned above are directly or indirectly linked to the “deregulation” policies that have also prevailed and affected the flows of refugees and migrants.

“Deregulation” does not imply so much the withdrawal of the state but rather the modification of its intervention. Mainly, it implies the disconnection of state functions of a social nature, even of social mechanisms, from the very needs of the society (Kapsalis, 2018).

It is now generally accepted that the balances established in previous periods (e.g., in the fordism phase) have been disturbed, while economic, social and political relations are subject to negotiation and rearrangement.

The way the non-equilibrium in the labour markets and the distribution sphere is regulated is extremely interest regarding the topic we are discussing.

Given that the existing mode of regulation leads to imbalances, there is the demand for another type of organization/regulation that will be alternative to the state-centred and market-based mode of regulation and which will inspire and highlight the value of self-motivation, self-organization and solidarity.

An essential element for undertaking new initiatives and social experimentation, inspired by the social innovation of bodies and organizations emerging in the context of the social and solidarity economy and oriented towards the formation of another model for organizing the “social” (Nikolopoulos & Kapogiannis, 2013, pp. 19-50, 72-92), could be — for a start — the clear identification and determination of the specific fixed, but inherently unjust point of equilibrium featuring the exclusion, marginalization and suffering “... of a part of society that does not possess the financial resources or the political power to produce the social goods it needs on its own...” (Kyriakidou & Salavou, 2014, p. 43).

3. The Evolution of Synergetic Social and Solidarity Economy Structures¹ for the Organizational Upgrade of the “Social”

The existence of non-equilibrium situations, such as those mentioned herein, means that there are needs that cannot be covered by simple improvements to existing structures (Kyriakidou & Salavou, 2014, p. 38).

To address such pressing needs as those that arose and still arise from large-scale cross-border population movements, innovative social actions are required.

There are in fact, according to the distinction of Nicholls (in Kyriakidou & Salavos, 2014, p. 51), different types of social innovation and only one of which is characterized as “institutional innovation” (the other two types are marginal and radical innovation, which we will develop further below).

Institutional innovation, in addition to contributing to the development of new products and services (Nicholls, 2010 in Kyriakidou; Salavou, 2014, p. 51), is also characterized by the fact that it proposes and invents, during the development process, new institutions and ways of organization through which the production of goods and the offer of services is achieved, thus contributing to the creation of dynamics for a different organization of the “social”.

The period of the crisis set, in our country too, the conditions and the background for the cultivation of initiatives taken “from below”, and the ingenuity that emerged through these social experiments was truly amazing.

The amount of innovation of SSSE structures that appeared in the years of crisis, is impressive. Indeed, these movements have reached such an organizational level that they are now beginning to discuss more complex forms of organization as well as different levels of cooperation (Kapsalis, 2018).

It is the very collective action taken by the citizens that creates expectations for evolving to new structures and cooperation networks. At the same time, the exchange of experiences between different networks emerging in the gaps that resulted from the lack of foresight and diligence of the competent public bodies and the lack of interest from the “people of the market” (due to low profitability) currently allow official and unofficial forms of SSSE to have prospects of forming a hopeful alternative movement. The challenge emerging through each individual structure of solidarity and synergetic economy lies in acquiring the identity of an overall social phenomenon (Baban et al., 2016).

4. Getting Experience From Innovative Social Enterprises and Their Contribution to Widening Horizons Through Organizational Learning

4.1 Civil Society Organisations (SSSE-NGOs) and Organisational Learning

As mentioned, in addition to institutional innovation, the undertaking of broader innovative social actions is of great importance for addressing the impact of crisis conditions (Kyriakidou & Salavou 2014, p. 52); such social actions are defined by the term “radical innovation”. A typical feature of this type of innovation is the cultivation of new ways of thinking or terms of reference that allow “... the radical redefinition of social problems and the finding of new solutions” (Kyriakidou & Salavou 2014, p. 51).

We believe that the various versions of organizational learning could have a decisive contribution both in cultivating new ways of thinking and in contributing to transformative practices - evolution of SSSE or NGO

¹ Synergetic Social and Solidarity Economy (SSSE).

structures, for facilitating the development of new solutions or regulatory mechanisms to address social and other issues related to refugee and migration flows.

This is true to the extent that, as recent research has shown (Vathi et al., 2015; Britton, 2005), a basic component of organizational learning is organization memory, namely the use of previous experience in future use. At the same time, knowledge management is inextricably linked to organizational learning (Britton, 2005, pp. 26-28), i.e., the systematic process by which the necessary knowledge is acquired, filtered, shared, stored, retrieved or used by an organization. Through it, the human factor, which is the heart of civil society organizations, is given the opportunity to share and utilize collective knowledge.

Another relevant and great aspect is viewing these organizations as a living organization (Britton, 1998) and even more so as a learning organization, since learning, in addition to gaining knowledge and experience, is also a constant change of thinking, perception and behaviour.

Consequently, citizens involved in SSSE activities are also the ones who change. The very fact of participating in transformational practices, is what transforms people's ideas, since it is participation in itself that changes the people who take part in such practices and not vice versa.

Today, in the field of SSSE, to enable members and bodies that participate in its practices and share its values to expand their role and contribute to finding answers to the challenges posed by the current refugee crisis, they need to form a new alternative model of “community” organization.

This upgrade of the role of these organizations through organizational learning can, in contrast to organizational amnesia (Vathi Vathi et al., 2015; Britton, 1998, p. 6), use the experience from the actions of traditional social economy, actions aimed at the rehabilitation of farmers and urban refugees, as well as the knowledge from good practices but also from examples to be avoided and problems that emerged in cooperative organizations of the previous generation.

5. Organizational Learning Sources for Synergetic Social and Solidarity Economy Structures

5.1 The Most Instructive Findings From the Rehabilitation of Refugees During the Interwar Period and Acquiring Knowledge From Cooperatives of the Previous Generation

Modern networks and organizations engaged in the task of regulating refugee or migrant flows or, at the least, mitigating the effects they entail, can gain valuable experience from actions similar to those used during the implementation of the giant project of refugee rehabilitation in the interwar period (Kapogiannis & Politis, 2011).

In connection with the subject herein, we examine some findings made regarding the role of traditional social economy (Kapogiannis & Politis, 2011, pp. 74-76) and which may be useful in view of the new roles that SSSE institutions will be asked to play. In specific, the rehabilitation of refugees, which, especially after 1923, was a key concern of Greek agricultural policy, is intertwined with the coexistence of bank-based and state regulation. The characteristic feature is that one regulatory mechanism, emanating from instruments of transnational nature, finally seems to have balanced the other, which was also a product of existing correlations within the specific social formation. Furthermore, the osmosis of economic — especially rural — policy with social policy seems to be reflected in the “dual” nature of the institutional structures of social economy that were assigned with processing the required procedures, in order to achieve the smooth integration of refugees in the Greek social formation. It is obvious that, in the interwar period, under the pressure of the refugee crisis, regulatory

mechanisms were established, through a network of institutions, national or supranational, emerging in the space where the institutional field of economic policy intersects the social one. Indeed, in this context, the aspects that emerge still attract the interest of researchers. The first aspect is intertwined with transnationalism characteristics, such as: Near East Relief (Clark, 2007, p. 168), American Women's Hospitals (Clark, 2007, pp. 174-175), "save the children" fund (Hirschon 2006, p. 92) which, apparently, must permeate the ways of regulation, when such issues of supranational scope arise. The other aspect is related to the adoption of social economy institutions, to allow to the social interaction, with the reciprocity systems it creates, to complete the action of regulatory mechanisms. It is understood that both aspects directly refer to two important tools of the policy pursued for refugee integration in the host country that was overwhelmed. Therefore, for example, understanding both the functions of the Refugee Rehabilitation Committee with its clearly transnational character, and the Cooperatives for the Rehabilitation of non-landowners of the Refugee Settlements, which were forced cooperatives, but became models of social economy institutions, having undertaken, locally, to implement the refugee rehabilitation policy. As pointed out in the past (Hirschon 2006, p. 448), there were entire areas in Northern Greece which served "as a workshop on the development of practices and methods of restoring and boosting the morale of war-torn and expatriate people". Such practices, which have attracted international interest, may provide useful input to future organizational innovations. Similarly, the current situation, such as the new refugee-immigration crisis that arose, requires that EU countries face it with institutions of a transnational character since, at least these countries, have the organizational infrastructure to proceed with the establishment of supranational regulatory mechanisms.

Significant and useful knowledge can be drawn when studying the experience gained through the action of the previous generation cooperatives as well as from projects that were implemented during the first (pre-crisis) phase of the new social economy and entrepreneurship. Although we cannot claim that there is systematic valuation for the majority of agricultural and urban cooperatives, the problems and vulnerabilities identified over their long history include: partisanship, bureaucratization, their procedural role, the lack of a common pace and of a structured collective identity. Especially with regard to the social enterprises that were set up, supported or launched in the first phase of the new social economy and entrepreneurship (around 2005 until shortly before the crisis), we should note the vulnerabilities that concern the lack of infrastructure, the difficulty of raising a critical amount of capital for their operation, the difficulty of financing but also the absence of a tax system that corresponds to the functions and nature of the services provided by social enterprises.

Finally, other authors (Baban et al., 2016) stressed the absence of a broader labour and social movement, which would be able to foster autonomy and solidarity, as well as the absence of a significant network of self-managed enterprises.

We can therefore assume that building new collectivities, stemming from the need to combine economic and social policy principles and objectives, can help in the "modal integration of migrants and refugees" (Schnapper 2000, p. 69).

6. The Adaptation of SSSE to New Needs as Expanded by the Refugee Crisis

6.1 Synergetic Social and Solidarity Economy Structure as Living Learning Organisms

The variety of civil society organizations that are active in Greece in the years of crisis and for addressing its impact, features several which could be helpful in dealing with the particular circumstances arising from the growing refugee and migration flows, acting as living learning organisms and through transformative practices.

There is a number of needs, which could be met, through the evolution and expansion of the role of the most active SSSE structures, which already have done significant work in this area. Indicatively, we mention actions related to the needs of food, medical care, housing, education.

At the same time, people staying for a longer period will be able to use in a more systematic manner Social Cooperative Enterprises of a productive or collective purpose, which will provide incentives for creating jobs. In other words, instead of waiting for time-consuming procedures of creating new institutional formations, at least in terms of addressing the most pressing of needs, the most active among existing civil society organizations could be activated by transformational practices and asked to contribute, adjusted to new circumstances.

In specific, we argue that if seen as living learning organisms, they could respond to fields of action related to their current activities, in a faster and easier manner. This is true to the extent that these, as learning organizations, with the constant transformation of experiences into knowledge and continuous experimentation will proceed to improvements and adjustments that promote their effectiveness and improve their environment, developing their special characteristics.

6.2 The Existing SSSE Organisations as a Model for New Structures Addressing the Refugee Crisis

Even before the recent crisis under objective conditions and due to the feeble civil society, there was difficulty in growing new forms of SSSE with initiatives from below.

Thus, contrary to what happened in several European countries, where legislative interventions were usually ratifying regulations that had already been imposed by habit and practice (Nikolopoulos & Kapogiannis, 2013) in a rather factual way, in our country we had a formative intervention of the legislator, with a process from above imposing an institutional framework for cooperative social economy.

On the other hand, the landscape that is being formed, despite any analogies, today, under the influence of different conditions, in the crisis we are experiencing, favoured the rapid spread of unofficial forms and networks of SSSE, a fact that forced the state to unwillingly get involved as the phenomenon evolved and simply to ensure the control of the rich “biodiversity” developing from the social experimentation in the context of SSSE.

This effort, over the last five years, shows an underlying tendency to anticipate a further development of the phenomenon so that it may be launched in a different direction, rather harmonized with the logic of the market social economy and, certainly not with an economy of needs and solidarity.

The resurgence of collective action and social solidarity triggered significant focal points of resistance. However, with the proliferation of practices of solidarity and collective action, we can also discern the features of a movement that have shaped (and still do) a new social consciousness.

We can highlight two levels in which social resistances are organized for addressing and overcoming the current crisis in SSSE structures: The first level includes more direct and simple forms, usually unofficial (such as structures and informal solidarity networks) as well as official and institutionalized forms (Social Cooperatives, Social Cooperative Enterprises). The second level, includes more complex forms that operate as links or starting points for models or plans for the “bottom-up” productive reconstruction of the country, which will enable the increase of employment for the abundant labour force available (domestic as well as foreign, mainly due to immigration and refugee flows). In fact, it is important that solidarity structures become more active and expand, in every sector and every area, and indeed be encouraged to start such a reconstruction effort, through their own transformation.

7. Conclusions

The outcome of the SSSE ventures and the dimensions they will take always depend on the relevant correlation of social and political forces. Due to their special nature, the dynamics that they will develop in pursuing their set goals will be based on internal dynamics and on the dynamics of the dominant reference system (Kapsalis, 2018).

Another important issue is how the potential that seems to be contained in the solidarity structures and networks will not be trapped or diverted, but will continue in the same creative direction and will use its comparative advantages, which arise from the strengthening of the social ties between locals and refugee or immigrant and the economy of proximity.

Obviously, the confidence gained through self-organization and small, everyday but significant successes must be preserved as a legacy for the future. The longer the viability of such ventures is extended, the more the belief spreads that we can, based on these solid foundations, build new, more complex structures to transform local economies. According to the wording of Graham and Gilson: “future possibilities become more sustainable if we see that they already exist, but in the light of a different imagination” (Nikolopoulou & Kapogiannis, 2013).

The future will show, to what extent the organizations that emerged in the crisis and took on the specific characteristics will be able to respond to more complex situations.

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