

## Expanded abstract

### Social and Solidarity Economy as an heterogeneous and diverse configuration. The case of the Province of Mendoza (Argentina)

#### Objectives Objectives Methodology

The development of processes framed within the so-called Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) has attracted considerable academic and political interest in Latin America, particularly in Argentina. Originating in the final years of the last century in a context of social and economic crisis, this phenomenon can be understood in empirical terms as a set of heterogeneous socio-economic experiences that have performed differently from the typical capitalist enterprise and with relative autonomy from state institutions as productive units that include associative, self-managed and democratic elements, as well as binds based on solidarity to other organisations in the field and their community in general (Pastore, 2010).

The general objective of this paper is to describe the development of the SSE in the Province of Mendoza (Argentina) over the last two decades, seeking to detect the existence (or not) of a “configuration of social relations” (De la Garza Toledo, 2011) linked to this field. It is assumed that the development of a conglomerate of SSE organizations in a specific spatio-temporal context depends on the different subjects involved in it, which are connected to each other through a set of disputes and agreements, giving unity and identity to this socio-economic group.

The analytical challenge of this work lies in recognising the accumulation of diverse experiences related to the SSE in Mendoza and identifying spaces of coordination between them that give them a certain unity as a whole. In other words, the aim is to transcend microscopic analyses that focus exclusively on the internal modes of work of a particular cooperative (Chaves, 1999) in order to concentrate on the processes and subjects of the SSE which, in a specific geographical environment, have made possible the emergence and constitution of new social subjects, different from those formed by capital (Rincón Gamba, 2011).

This research is part of a line of work that focuses its attention on broad and heterogeneous empirical trajectories, most of which exceed the established institutional framework. The reason for this position lies in the empirical condition of the sector in Argentina and, particularly, in Mendoza; formal registers in this geographical space present, in many cases, outdated data and are not sufficient to capture informal cooperative practices, which have emerged and gained relevance over the past two decades (Gudiño, 2015; Roitman, 2011).

## Methodology

The research approach is qualitative because its interest is directed at the ways in which the social world -the SSE in Mendoza- is interpreted, understood, experienced and produced (Vasilachis, 2006). Therefore, the data obtained through an inductive approach have been sensitive to the social context in which they have been produced.

In specific terms, the research work consisted, in the first place, of compiling and reading information from secondary sources: academic articles, journalistic writings, institutional diagnoses and legal norms. In addition, there was another invaluable secondary source of information: a set of emails from the organisations that make up this network, which contained minutes of meetings and newsletters from these organisations. This was complemented with anthropological work materialised through a prolonged presence at various events associated with the subject in Mendoza between 2010 and 2015, in order to carry out adequate direct observation, not only to bring into play the ability to “see”, but also to “interact” with the “other” (Ameigeiras, 2006:113), all of which took the form of ethnographic work condensed into field notes. With this material, over the course of 2015, four in-depth interviews were carried out, defined by means of purposeful sampling (Quinn Paton, 2002), given that people were selected from whom relevant and valuable information was expected to be obtained (Stake, 1998) due to their trajectory linked to the SSE. Most of these tasks and the access to detailed information on the actions carried out in the framework of the SSE were achieved thanks to the immersion and participation of the researcher in the very processes that were analysed. It was an interactive work between the one who writes and the subjects, descriptive and analytical. Finally, the systematisation of all the material obtained was carried out between 2016 and 2018.

## Results

After the analysis of the entire SSE trajectory in the Province of Mendoza from its origins in the late 1990s until 2015, the work has found a line of historical and political continuity with roots in the unemployed movements and barter networks on the one hand, and the Mesa de Economía Social Mendoza (MESM, Round Table of Social Economy) and the Foro de Economía Social Mendoza (FESM, Forum of Social Economy), on the other. In other words, the main result of this research is the identification and description of a “configuration of the SSE” in Mendoza.

This configuration began to take form from an initial stage of resistance and demands towards the state in a context of social emergency that encouraged many individuals to choose economic alternatives outside the catalogue of possibilities that were being considered at the time. For their part, both the MESM and the FESM were the political spaces that were specifically defined as instigators and promoters of the configuration of the SSE in Mendoza. In both cases, they were multi-sectoral networks.

Another central aspect, as a basic unifying factor for this configuration, was the realization, in 2012, of the 5th Regional Forum on Social Economy, which occurred together with the 2nd National Forum “Towards Another Economy”. These events changed the form of work consid-

erably between the cooperatives, with the presence of various academics recognised in the field, as well as officials from the National Ministry of Social Development and other national and provincial agencies. A legal action was also carried out in the provincial legislature with the aim of the promotion of the sector. This meeting condensed the qualities of a revulsive “event” (Santos, 1996; Silveira, 2013) given that it transformed the fabric of the SSE, giving a certain unity and identity to the configuration of this political space.

Finally, the configuration of the SSE took shape with the approval of Law N° 8.435, which condensed many of the concerns, needs and objectives that have been present in the FESM and MESM.

## Conclusions

The SSE in Mendoza, as a configuration, presents porous limits. This is probably due, among other things, to the absence of major definitions of its work and its economic project, which stems from the high degree of social, political and economic heterogeneity and diversity that characterise the configuration. If this diversity gives it a plurality of voices, it also feeds organisational fragmentation. In other words, the intersectoriality and flexibility of this field, which have been highlighted by the subjects themselves as instigating qualities of organisation, have, over time, become obstacles that prevent some progress for the SSE in the province, as in the case of the effective implementation of Law No. 8.435, a difficulty that cooperativism has also encountered elsewhere in Latin America (Da Ros, 2007).

## Original Value and Limitations

The plurality of the configuration of SSE in Mendoza makes it possible to consider a large number of informal experiences that are part of it, which, among other things, is expressed in the limitation that takes the form in a high degree of instability of the whole process. For this reason, the objective of understanding a process such as this requires an in-depth approach to “what really exists” (Mora and Hinkelammert, 2005), an issue resolved by means of an interpretative analysis using a qualitative methodology.

However, it is necessary to dimension the size of the SSE configuration in Mendoza, which will allow us to better understand the impact of its activity (Carrasco and Buendía-Martínez, 2013) and, from there, to dynamise decision-making of the configuration in general, as well as the adjustment of public policies for the sector, among other ways.

This paper constitutes a starting point in this pending task, while at the same time providing some analytical tools for research in other geographical spaces with similar characteristics, the main contribution of this research.

**Keywords:** Social and Solidarity Economy, configuration, sociogenesis, workers, producers, social organizations.