

**Thematic issue of RELA:  
“Social economy as an alternative to capitalism – Learning  
solidarity and autonomy”**

Submission deadline: 31. December 2015

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The label of social economy is broad, encompassing a range of economic activities and organisations which share the attribute of NOT being driven for profit; thus social economy can be seen as an important alternative to modern capitalist production.

Some of the practices that today fit into the label have a long history. For example, cooperativism had its origins in the XIX century. As an economic practice it is inspired by the values of autonomy, equality and solidarity that can be made concrete by the foundational principles of modern cooperativism (Birchall, 1997), such as the democratic control of the cooperative by the cooperative members; the fact that decision-making is made independently of the capital contribution of the members; State independency; or the cooperative ties that quite often exist between the different cooperatives.

More recently there has been a burst of experiences of different natures, usually but not only organised by the third sector, which challenge the basic principles of capitalist production. To mention just a few, the *Grameen* Bank in Bangladesh that gave birth to the microcredit experiences all over the world; the cooperatives belonging to the *Mondragon* group that grew immensely and nowadays has its own university; the various practices stemming from the LETS system (Local Exchange Trading System); the Fair trade initiatives that challenge the injustice of modern capitalist globalised trade; the associations of garbage pickers in Brazil and Colombia; not to mention a variety of systems and practices that appear locally in a great number of countries, such as employee buy-outs, parents' self-organized child care, enterprises based on people on the margins of the formal labour market, alternative social institutions etc. This set of experiences when looked altogether not only is varied in its nature, but also shows that a numerous number of citizens and institutions are capable of organising and through different participative (sometimes large-scale) initiatives, try to achieve a social purpose in economy under the principles of dignity and solidarity – this is why what begun to be labelled simply as social economy is today sometimes called social economy and solidarity.

There are two central features that should be present in social economy activities: they are not driven by profit; and contrarily there should be a central logic of people's life quality improvement according to a perspective of equality. Santos (2003), in a book adequately titled “*Produce to live: the paths of non-capitalist production*”, points out nine important features of social economy. Stressing only a few:

- Once the profit logic is absent, the incomes of productive activity should be used to bring advantages to further people, in a sustainability logic;
- Social economy targets the most fragile collectives of society that are excluded in some cases (thus to have a productive activity is a first step for changing their situation);
- Experiences often come from the third sector but the State can act as an important partner; and should be based in principles of equality, social justice and solidarity;
- Although those are essentially productive practices, they have the potentiality to promote changes in social and cultural systems.

We are interested in the learning dimensions of social economy. In a time where adult education is stretched between reformatory community engagements and a functional subordination under employability and work qualifications the emerging social economy represents a potential new frame of reference for adult learning. First of all it entails a fundamental (need for) learning of autonomy – social economy relies on members who collectively take responsibility and shape their own life. Secondly we need to see social economy as a utopian and open horizon which can only gradually be developed by learning processes.

Apart from conceptual reflections on the relations between work, socialisation and learning it seems urgent to study the learning and education aspects of the emergence process – the micro processes of developing different types of social economy and the learning from experiences in activities already going on. From the empirical studies in the learning from such activities we may gain insight not only in the potential and difficulties of such organisation but also more general insights in the significance of socio-economic frameworks and individual learning and identity.

For this thematic issue two types of articles are welcome:

- Conceptual or review articles problematizing aspects of social economy and solidarity, in terms of its multiple relationships with adult education and learning;
- Empirical studies which analyse social economy experiences and provide reflections of its education and learning aspects.

Deadline for submission is the end of 2015. Papers should be submitted, formatted according to author guidelines available at [www.rela.ep.liu.se](http://www.rela.ep.liu.se), to [aalmeida@ualg.pt](mailto:aalmeida@ualg.pt) and [hso@ruc.dk](mailto:hso@ruc.dk)

## References

- Birchall, J (1997). *The international cooperative movement*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Santos, B. de S. (org.) (2003). *Produzir para viver: Os caminhos da produção não capitalista [Produce to live. The paths of non-capitalist production]*. Porto: Edições Afrontamento.