SOCIAL ECONOMY AND LEARNING FOR A POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SOLIDARITY
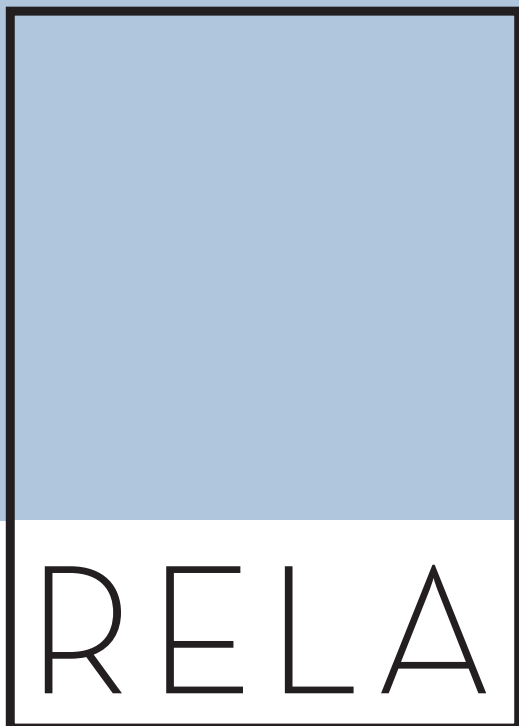
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Contents

Editorial: social economy and learning for a political economy of solidarity

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Introduction

The dominant theme in the discussion of adult and continuing education in this millennium has been the increasing influence of economic rationales. Activities related to work and employment are prioritized and policy issues are no long questions of access and equal opportunities nor learning for citizenship and democracy. The attention has moved from the educational visions and intentions to the questions about learning outcome and competence development as an economic resource. In research and intellectual work this shift is reflected in new discourses which conceptualize learning activities from the point of view of their efficacy in individuals' competence – their ability to make use of learning outcome in social practices that cannot be anticipated and prepared for directly. In the RELA-issue on the new(?) competence regime(s) – RELA 2013/2 (Nicoll & Olesen, 2013; Salling Olesen, 2013) - we published a number of articles problematizing the use of the term competence and its tendency to assess human resources by their applicability in a capitalist labour market. For many researchers and practitioners this trend has led to a disgust for this competence discourse – but this issue of RELA also included contributions that opted for a broader idea of competences which could enable political autonomy and democratic work life. The argument was that "competence" in fact may become a holistic and practice related reconceptualization of learning. Following this argument the problem is not in the notion of competence but in the "political economy" in which it is used – where political economy refers to the real system of production and exchange and its built-in legitimacy and penetration of social discourses and political reason at large.

This conceptual dispute is at the core of adult and continuing education policy discussion. The term lifelong learning has widened the horizon to learning in different environments and put the learner in focus – but at the same time shifted its connotation – now pointing out a general request for everyone to learn in order to secure employability and economic efficiency. Adult and continuing education has gained political importance but even more important is the relatively inclining significance of

informal learning, learning in everyday life, in social activities that are not necessarily organized for learning purposes.

The increasing request for employable skills and economic efficiency are directed towards formal and non-formal education and training, but also towards learning in everyday life. It comes from comes from a capitalist development in which human resources seem to be an increasingly important factor. While living in this environment we internalize the logics of the political economy, and the request on education and training to contribute with particular competences immediately seems legitimate.

Lots of people are uncomfortable with the degree and narrowness of this request. But most of those opposing it mostly do not challenge the political economy as such, but they seek to preserve a classical bourgeois idea of a boundary between the economic sphere and a civic and private sphere to which they want to assign education, or at least some types of education. We think that this struggle for an education sector as a protected sphere, unaffected by the economic system is already overtaken by the development, at least in the developed capitalist world, leaving at best a fading residual. Rather we assume that people learn from their lives and the society in which they live – learning is a life experience. This is the core of material theorizing of learning. For education it means that what people learn also in formal and informal education is structurally and not least subjectively shaped by the economic environment– and in their life world there is no fence between an economic sphere and a private or civic sphere. But where could then learning escape the self-legitimizing, quasi-natural capitalist reason?

With this material conception of learning we look for social spaces in which alternative (political) economies could be found emerging, not as ideas only but as material social dynamics (Negt & Kluge, 2014). This was the background for launching the call for papers for this thematic issue: Which are the life worlds that might provide alternative life experiences? How would the question of competence development appear in relation to economies and economic activities that are not capitalist? Which competences are needed and what learning is fostered in such environments outside or on the margins of capitalist economy and labour market? Instead of research relating direct to the main trends in the dominant economic structure and its followers in discourses of learning we wanted to draw the attention to a part of the economy which is not following capitalist rationale – which comprises not quite small but often neglected economic activities. We wanted to call forward research into the learning processes which take place within or in conjunction with these activities as well as the requirements for learning following from these activities. Can we instead of scouting for the ambiguities in the mainstream competence discourse more directly find alternative competence goals and learning practices which may indicate trans-capitalist aspirations and ideas about alternative economic framework for social life? By pointing broadly to learning and social economy we hoped to find research addressing these questions.

While recognizing the variety of social purposes in the social economy, which is a point in itself, we want to focus on those dimensions where social economy breaches the prevailing rationales of capitalism, or where the activity is in a tension between the social purposes pursued and capitalist economy as mediated by direct economic relations (markets) or cultural factors (socialization and values of participants). Contemporary capitalism is a political economy in the sense that it is quasi-natural universal order which is underpinned by the shift of power from the nation states or local communities to structures with almost no faces and locations which prescribes values and rationalities.

Many of the elements discussed above can be found in the first article of this issue – a text by Lisa Mychajluk, titled Learning to live and work together in an ecovillage community of practice. Ecovillages are citizen-organised residential communities that strive for a more sustainable way of life. These communities of practice provide an everyday collective life experience in which citizens can gradually learn in an alternative way, developing practices of living well in place. The social learning taking place is of course fundamental to build and maintain the cooperative culture. More than that, Lisa Mychajluk shows the importance of building a set of social competences (inclusive discussion, honest and compassionate communication, non-violent conflict resolution, embracing diversity of people and perspectives, etc.) which are key in this alternative way of living and working collectively.

The label of social economy is a broad, inclusive term encompassing a range of economic activities and organisations which share the attribute of NOT being driven for profit. Some of the practices that today fit into the label come a long way. Most obviously cooperativism had its origins in the 19th century. Cooperatives are, like the name indicates, based on the idea that the socially unifying factor is work, and access and rights are based on the participation in work. In this sense they can be seen as the simplest opponent to capitalism. As an economic practice it is inspired in the values of autonomy, equality and solidarity that can be made concrete by the foundational principles of cooperativism (Birchall, 1997): the democratic control of the cooperative by the cooperative members; decision-making independently of the capital contribution of the members; independence of State; cooperative ties with other cooperatives..

However, social economy evolved to include more than classic (or innovative) forms of cooperativism. Santos (2003b), in a book adequately titled "*Produce to live: the paths of non-capitalist production*", points out nine important features of social economy of which we will just mention 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.

Recently we have seen a great variety of experiences of economic organisations which challenge the basic principles of capitalist production and exchange emerging. 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; 20 years after the breakdown of the Yugoslav Self-management system the employees of the huge electro industry Koncar in Zagreb took over a bankrupt company and continued its operation, and even founded a so called ethical bank in conjunction with it; one of the big homecare service providers in US is a cooperative; 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 participatory budget experiences in Porto

Alegre, Brazil, that were an inspiration for the various models of participatory budgets that exist in a big number of countries; not to mention a variety of systems and practices that appear locally in a huge 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 sample of experiences in social economy shows that numerous citizens and institutions are capable of organizing and through different participative (sometimes large-scale) economic initiatives, seek to achieve a social purpose instead of seeking profit and capital accumulation.

Many of these activities and organizations are organized in the "third sector" between private capitalist market based sector and the state. In modernized capitalist societies a substantial part of economic and social activity is organized by the state, in a public realm, pursuing social purposes without any need for profitability. That is not what we are looking for, although some of our questions could also be raised in that context. Likewise you can imagine private activities pursuing social purposes without profitability, like private philanthropy, without any substantial aspect of economic exchange. They are also not the topic here. The third sector category mostly implies a partly but not entirely market based operation: most production cooperatives sell their products in more or less open markets, and many of them have to borrow capital in the ordinary financial market. Others which are subsidized by the state produce goods or services which must be sold in the market. Consumer cooperatives obviously compete in an open market with profit-based providers. There is, therefore, various kinds of social purposes in the social economy. This point seems important to us, because social economy structured itself around the plural nature of economic activity. At the same time, it opposed the reductive trends of economy to the principles of the market and to the rationale of private accumulation. As such, social economy has an important role in building new regimes of social well-being (Gaiger, 2009), but the practices of their organisations are not exempt of tensions or contradictions, as often are forced to navigate between the state and the markets – and find, at the same time, creatives ways to still pursue their goals.

At this point, we want to highlight the second text of our thematic issue, by Jennifer Sumner and Cassie Wever – Learning Alterity in the Social Economy: The Case of the Local Organic Food Co-ops Network in Ontario, Canada. The paper looks inside a coalition of co-operatives that focus on locally and sustainably produced food, reflecting on the learning dimensions of this social economy organisation. The words of the authors might help us to understand deeper the difficulties and tensions of social economy organisations:

> Like fair trade, the social economy operates both within and against the market, offering an alternative while still being embedded within the capitalist economy. In the words of Goodman et al. (2014, p. 83), organizations in the social economy 'sit somewhat uneasily between the private sector and the state, between market and non-market relations, and profit-making and non-profit structures, often combining elements of each'. While the economic values of these organizations may be similar to market values, their social values stand in stark contrast to the individual, self-serving values championed by the capitalist economy.

Learning is central in this context. Simply put, Jennifer Sumner and Cassie Wever found that the members of this network of cooperatives participated in social learning and learned *alterity* in the social economy – a very important concept in our opinion, although vague. Learning alterity within social economy lies at the very core of finding new ways to solve these contradictions and therefore find alternatives to capitalism. It

discusses how it is possible to coexist with capitalism, but still try 'to change it from within'. In this context, learning alterity is not simple nor without problems, but it identified the ambivalent condition of learning "otherness" being inside and at the margens of the prevailing economic system at the same time.

We said before that social economy is a broad, inclusive term. It is also noticeable that its evolution was everything but linear, suffering various influences from the wider social political contexts across the world. In more than one historical period or space, social economy has been accused of a certain decay in its ability to discuss the political societal models, or in its relative compliance (or denial) to become a simple 'economy of repair' (Laville, 2004). A different label was born around the 80s of the 20th century, which gradually gain visibility: that of solidarity economics. Solidarity economics is not exclusive of Latin American, as it might seem at first sight. Along the decade of the 90s, it has grown roots in various francophone contexts, seeking new paths regarding (the more?) institutionalised organisations of social economy. In addition, a big number of labels and related concepts later on developed, not only in Latin America, but also in Africa or Asia: popular economy, familiar economy, community economy, among others (Defourny & Develtere, 1999).

In Latin America, solidarity economics refers to a set of practices departing from the free and democratic association of workers, whereas cooperatives usually act as a company in the market, but having a different internal structure. Solidarity economics is strongly connected to citizenship and popular education, it entails cooperation in economy but also makes available to the collectives the means of production and the self-management of activities of various natures (Gaiger, 2009). By promoting the everyday life participation, solidarity economics call for the involvement of people in community problems and, more important, try to face wider collective struggles. Solidarity economics experiences are usually organised in citizenship building settings, thus favouring the creation of public spaces characterised by proximity (Tauile, 2002). It denies the separation between societal dimensions and economy, trying to join a certain efficiency with the productive cooperation (Gaiger, 2006).

Although much could be said to explain the sociological roots of the emergence of these different phenomena, it is important to stress that there is not an opposition between social economy and solidarity economics, which share obvious commonalities and purposes. Both aim to be a switch from the conception of a market society to the notion of a plural economy, even if the utopia seems hard to achieve. For Laville (2003), much depends on the ability to enhance the cooperation between the social economy and solidarity economics, together with a capacity to improve the relations with social movements and public bodies.

Nevertheless, one should stress solidarity economics' characteristics that express contextual configurations of southern public spaces and social struggles. For example, the centrality of self-management that culminate in strong social networks of cooperation; the informality, in a way related to the intense informal character of some of the southern economies themselves; or the strong political dimension, which, in some places, has aided to the building of different qualities for democracy. Just to give an example, Santos (2003), while researching the Porto Alegre participatory budget experience, has shown that the participatory budget not only introduced to the models of the processes a mix of representative and direct democracy, but also that the quality of representative democracy itself was enhanced with these participatory citizens practices.

The similarities between social economy and solidarity economics do not erase their historical and contextual differences – expressing, probably, the north-south differences. As Gaiger (2009) has shown, in the south it is mostly about struggling

against poverty and misery, using the virtues of popular economy to find solutions to these phenomena. This explains why it is so important to find alternatives to capitalism, in the sense of building economic relations free from reproduction of inequalities or processes of exploitation. However, taking into account the focus of our thematic issue, the important is that those and other conditions of solidarity economics tend to shape a *different way of learning*, closely connected to the social actors experiences. And this different way of learning can maybe be a pre-requisite to the sustainability of the alternative experiences.

The third article of this thematic issue, by Marta Gregorčič, is Community learning and learning-by-struggling in solidarity economics. It is a radical proposal coming from an ethnographic approach combined with a militant research approach, in the south (India and Venezuela), that discusses critically solidarity economics. It introduces the concept of *potentias* in the context of autogenous revolutionary struggles, showing us that a more radical breach with capitalism is not simply a utopia. However, in order to build such critical communities oriented towards processes of social change, learning is key, primarily to develop processes of Freirian *conscientization* – which expresses a dynamic connecting awareness processes, the learning that change is possible, and the actions that make this change concrete. Marta Gregorčič show us the importance of learning-by-struggling taking place in solidarity economics practices, vital to community building. Truly learning by-struggling revisits the links between learning and social change. In the author words,

> Learning-by-struggling is mutual articulation of collective self-determination and cooperation which is taking place through communication and decision-making platforms such as the assembly, *mukhiya*, councils, or the political and educational space of coming together in dialogue – *encuentros* – through diverse and heterogeneous platforms. These meetings of *conscientização* invite, convince, encourage, and make people understand the importance of their participation and are re-creating the community of the oppressed into *potentias*.

This third article brings us closer to the focus of our thematic issue and the reasoning about its relation to learning. We see social economy as a potentially alternative reference for learning: As a lived live which partly enacts different values and rationales it is a learning environment – and it also presupposes specific skills and competences.

First of all social economy and solidarity economics entail 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. Many of the social purposes have the nature of mitigating some of the impacts of capitalism: Securing the access to work/employment for a certain group of people. Avoiding the environmental damages of production. Securing survival of a community or region. Saving cultural values that cannot survive on market conditions. But most of them also and unconnected have a utopian and innovative nature: Shaping a good work situation. Raising quality standards of goods and services. Creating novel products. Creating the space for individual and collective values, for artistic work, etc.

Utopian ideas in the sense of unrealistic wishful thinking is an all too easy response to the weight of the prevailing political economy, and not so fruitful. On the contrary we assume that exactly the fact that social economy exists only in forms that partly breaks the universal economic rationality, but also does so as a result of strong engagements and indeed important social reasons form the condition for learning processes which in turn pave a way for alternatives. For this reason the empirical study of the actual

learning processes in social economy could provide a "learning laboratory environment" for learning processes that involve fundamental social and psychic reconfigurations of people involved (Salling Olesen, 2014) – and also showing the needs and challenges for moving beyond the capitalist political economy. Apart from conceptual reflections on the relations between work, socialisation and learning, the articles in this issue bring what we may in this context call case studies in 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 gain insight not only in the potential and difficulties of such organisations but also more general insights in the significance of socio-economic frameworks and individual learning and identity.

The next contributions to this issue fit this category of important case studies that further illustrate the importance of learning in social economy. Oksana Udovyk wrote "I cannot be passive as I was before" - Learning from grassroots innovations in Ukraine. The article focuses the learning processes within grassroots innovations emerging in post-EuroMaidan times in Ukraine, claiming this educational space to promote critical consciousness development. The author uses a Freirian inspiration to analyse the development of elements of critical consciousness. In this environment

and despite the great strength of previous experience of social actors, social learning leads to the development of dialogical skills, reflection capacity, etc., that seem to increase efficacy and agency.

The fifth article of this issue reflects on the educational potential of social economy projects in the Himalayas: The case of Avani, by V.P.J. Sambhavi, Mieke Berghmans, and Joke Vandenabeele. The Avani are a community-based organisation whose projects represent an experience within the prevailing logic of capitalism – the same capitalism that condemn those hill communities to be excluded by its mainstream mechanisms of functioning. But the Avani's choose 'to use local resources to create innovative market practices and in doing so giving a tactical twist to what we have described as a discriminatory place logic of capitalism'. Therefore, their place turned into a production site, even if the learning processes inside are not without tensions. As we saw before in this text, it is not easy to be simultaneously 'in' and 'against'. The Avani seek to incorporate an attention towards the environment and social justice, fighting the inequalities produced by capitalism, within the framework of market practices and a regular capitalist economy. Clearly, this is not a linear path, but surely is a common goal to other experiences, once again reminding us how alterity can be crucial when choosing the social economy paths. The emancipatory potential of such practices cannot dismiss the building of educational spaces as a requisite for the people to be able to participate in action and social change, strengthening our claims on the importance of learning processes within social economy.

The last article of this thematic issue is titled 'The social economy as produced space: The 'here and now' of education in constructing alternatives'. This text by Scott Brown is different in nature from the rest of the contributions: a theoretical essay that deals with learning within the social economy only via a spatial analysis. In a first moment, the author uses Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy to build arguments on the importance of dialogical relations as framed between subjectivity and objectivity. In a second moment, the article gets an inspiration from Lefebvre to lead us to understand capitalism as a spatial force. In fact, in the core of this text lies the concept of *produced space* as capable of describing the complexity of the processes of social economy, both inside or outside contemporary capitalism. Capitalism itself is the worldwide bigger producer of dominant, excluding spaces. It is no strange that critical geographers turn

their attention to this spatial dimension or to the incongruences between time and space nowadays. The concept of globalisation by Harvey (2000), for example, is precisely drawing our attention on the capitalism ability to produce, dismantle and re-organise its productive landscapes, with an increasing temporal freedom. Thus, globalisation can be understood as global phenomenon that produces unequal landscapes – or uneven developments of time and space.

Social economy in its many variations and vague delimitations is an environment produced by global capitalism. Yet it may also enable social practices and learning processes which might not necessarily follow the mainstream rules of today's capitalism. In fact, such social practices can be seen as a learning outcome responding to life conditions and contradictions in capitalism. If we understand societal dynamics as historical and material processes we must direct empirical attention to study the micro-processes in which such endogenous dynamics may potentially grow up. Assuming that learning within such micro-processes form the key to any agentic capacity of social change this thematic issue has visited a few particular cases which expose specific learning environment and specific learning processes Even though some of the articles do not theorize learning very explicitly they seem to indicate that social economy can be both the presupposition and the potential outcome of such emergent learning processes.

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Learning to live and work together in an ecovillage community of practice

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Abstract

Ecovillages are citizen-organised residential communities that strive for a more sustainable way of life based on a culture of cooperation and sharing, as deemed necessary to support a shift to a post carbon world (Dawson, 2006; Lockyer & Veteto, 2013; Korten, 2006). While much can potentially be learned from the study of these experimental sustainable communities, perhaps their greatest contribution is to help us understand how to transition from individualism and competition in order to live 'smaller, slower and closer (Litfin, 2014)'. Drawing on a social theory of practice (Wenger, 1998) and concept of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), this paper considers how one ecovillage is learning the social competencies necessary to live and work well "in community", and in doing so, it co-constructs and sustains a cooperative culture.

Keywords: Ecovillages; cooperative culture; social competencies; situated learning; communities of practice

Introduction

The jury's in: our capitalist-consumer culture has got to go. Ted Trainer sums up the argument as such:

> …that affluent-industrial-consumer-capitalist society is grossly unsustainable, that rich world per capita levels of resource consumption and ecological impact are far beyond levels that can be kept up for long or that all the world's people could share, and that there must be large scale de-growth and radical system change if we are to solve the problems. (2016, p. 3)

Ecological footprint calculations for North America and Europe support this claim of overconsumption (Folke, 2013; Pretty, Ball, Benton, Guivant, Lee, Orr, Pfeffer & Ward, 2007), and scientific research suggests that it is responsible for severe disruption to three critical planetary processes – climate, biodiversity, and the nitrogen cycle (Folke, 2013). Furthermore, a growing number of critics align with Trainer's critique of the dominant paradigms of capitalism and consumerism, stating that in addition to fuelling inequality and other ill-being (Hall, 2009), they are also not making us happier, and

even undermining the foundations of life itself (Pretty et al., 2007). Detractors conclude that nothing short of complete systemic and cultural change is necessary (Clammer, 2016; Foster, Clark & York, 2010; Moore & Rees, 2013). Many have called for a re-definition of prosperity in the form of resilient, co-operative, materially (self)sufficient communities (cf. De Young & Princen, 2012; Heinburg, 2004/2005; Hopkins, 2008; Korten, 2006; McKibben, 2008). In other words, we need to live and work well in the places where we live.

Individuals and groups around the world are recognizing and responding to the need for a fundamental shift in how we live and work – perhaps best illustrated by the plethora of initiatives included in Paul Hawken's (2007), review, *Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Social Movement in History Is Restoring Grace, Justice, and Beauty to the World*. Among these examples of restorative human enterprise are ecovillages - citizen-organised residential communities that seek to model alternative social and economic constructs, and be part of building a bio-regional culture of cooperation and sharing, as deemed necessary to support a shift to a post carbon world (Dawson, 2006; Korten, 2006; Lockyer & Veteto, 2013; Litfin, 2014;). Despite growing recognition that ecovillages provide opportunities to learn how to live more sustainably (Dawson, 2008; Lockyer & Veteto, 2013; Litfin, 2014), the processes of ecovillage learning have remained unexplored by academics.

Through this paper, I aim to take a small step forward in understanding ecovillage learning processes. Specifically, I explore how social competencies and a cooperative culture are built and sustained at an ecovillage (as part of a broader practice in living sustainably), and the role that learning plays in this process. To understand the learning process, I draw upon socio-cultural learning theory, in particular the concept of communities of practice (CoP) (Wenger, 1998). While, to my knowledge, this learning theory has not yet been utilized in order to understand the ecovillage learning process, very recent literature that draws upon CoP theory as a means of explaining and analysing learning in other grassroots sustainable community initiatives (Bradbury & Middlemiss, 2015; Burke, 2017) suggests its relevance. Through a case study of social competency development at an ecovillage, I explore the potential of the CoP concept to understand ecovillage learning, including the co-creation and practise of a sustainable and cooperative culture. Through this study, I find competence supported by the socio-cultural practices of the community, but also, I identify a structural barrier to full participation in cooperative practices that puts into question the true sustainability of the community.

Background

An 'ecovillage' – a term first used by Robert and Diane Gilman in *Ecovillages and Sustainable Communities: A Report for Gaia Trust* – is commonly understood as a '…human scale, full-featured settlement in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world in a way that is supportive of healthy human development, and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future (Gilman 1991, quoted in Dawson, 2006, p. 13)'. While still widely referenced, the original definition has been criticized for its light address of the social and spiritual dimensions of the ecovillage concept, and for failing to draw attention to some key ecovillage attributes, which Dawson suggests include 'seeking to win back some measure of control over community resources (2006, p. 36)' and acting 'as centres of research, demonstration, and (in most cases) training (*ibid*)'. Liz Walker (2005), a long time ecovillage resident,

adds to our general understanding of the concept, referring to ecovillages as communities where members live out shared values in a cooperative manner, through alternative social structures and economies.

Although the number of ecovillages worldwide is unknown, the Global Ecovillage Network lists over 400 (self-identified) ecovillages, as well as several networks of traditional villages in the Global South (representing about 15.000 individual villages) that are transforming along more ecological and participatory lines (Litfin, 2014). Furthermore, the Communities Directory of the Federation of Intentional Communities suggests exponential growth of ecovillages in North America over a two-decade period, showing listings of intentional communities up from 304 in 1990 to 1,055 in 2010, with those communities identifying as ecovillages rising from 7% in 2007 to 32% by 2010 (Schaub, 2010).

While incredibly diverse, because their exact constitution varies dependent on the make-up of their inhabitants, and on their locality, ecovillages share a common desire to construct "low impact", high quality ways of life, in harmonious relationship with their local and global ecologies (Joubert & Dregger, 2015; Litfin, 2014). Ecovillages strive to enact their desired lifestyle through a fairly common set of strategies: the design of ecologically-aware human settlements, promoting sustainable local economies, organic and local food production, earth restoration practices, social inclusion, and participatory, community-scale governance (Dawson, 2006). Also common, is the development of alternative economic and social arrangements, such as inclusive decision-making, cooperative enterprise, collective consumption, and 'economic communalism' (Lockyer, 2010), e.g. the common ownership and / or sharing of land, housing, businesses, vehicles, equipment/tools, and other infrastructure/resources (Dawson, 2006; Lockyer, 2010; Liftin, 2014).

Ecovillages, cooperative culture, and social competencies

Cooperative culture is at the heart of the ecovillage approach. Cooperative culture is not just about sharing (though that is an important part of it) - it is largely about a way of interacting that places relationships at the centre (Schaub, 2016). Participatory decision-making that values all perspectives, the peaceful resolution of conflict, and a 'we' (rather than 'me') mentality are all elements of cooperative culture. However, for people accustomed to operating in the fundamentally competitive and hyper-individualistic world of capitalism (Korten, 2006), a shift to a cooperative, sharing culture requires a significant amount of un/learning. But how, exactly, can a fundamental shift in a way of being be achieved? Gladwell (2002) posits that such fundamental change is achieved through the creation of a community, where new beliefs and behaviours can be expressed, nurtured, and practised. Thus, ecovillages – often described as places of experimentation and learning (Dawson, 2006; Litfin, 2014) – may provide productive learning spaces (Bradbury & Middlemiss, 2015) for expression of cooperative culture, including nurturing and practising how to live and work together.

The notion that we need to learn how to live together – a seemingly simple assertion – is recognized as a profoundly important competence for our current times, if we are to realize a sustainable future (c. f. International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, Delors, J., & Unesco., 1996). Litfin draws on the ideas of social theorist Philip Slater to suggest that our seemingly underdeveloped competence to live together in modern times is the result of our tendency to treat relationships (human-to-human and human-to-nature) like toilets, where: '…unwanted matter,

unwanted difficulties, unwanted complexities, and obstacles (2014, p. 53)' are thought to disappear when removed from our immediate vision, but as a result we see a decrease in '…the knowledge, skill, resources, and motivation necessary to deal with them (*ibid*)'.

Beatriz, an affluent Columbian identified in an article by Burke & Arjona (2013), provides a good example of how a lack of cooperative live-work competency (particularly in a situation of self-organisation) can unhinge the ability to pursue a way of life centred on *bien-ser* (good-being) and *bien-vivir* (good-living). Beatriz, along with her would-be ecovillagers, found that their ultimate challenge was not in learning how to farm or to construct buildings for the first time, but that they '…lacked tools, experiences, and wisdom to coexist in harmony, resolve conflicts, and make consensus an instrument of genuinely egalitarian, collaborative decision making (Burke & Arjona, 2013, p. 240)'. Beatriz's story is not unique. In fact, long term ecovillage resident and group process consultant Dianne Leafe Christian (2003) estimates that nine out of 10 ecovillage attempts fail. Moreover, while the reasons are many (failure to find the necessary land or money being key ones), of those that actually "break ground", the lack of necessary social competencies is often thought to contribute heavily to their demise. That considered, those ecovillages that have managed to continue to exist – some for decades now – provide insight on how learning how to live and work together within a cooperative culture is central to the ecovillage experience. In this paper, I present the findings of a case study of Whole Village – an ecovillage in Canada – to illustrate the centrality of this learning process, and then, I utilize the concept of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) to frame a discussion on this learning process. I begin with a brief review of the theory of situated learning, and the concept of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), to support the discussion.

Situated learning, communities of practice, and legitimate peripheral participation

Ecovillages are lived worlds – as such, the socio-cultural traditions of learning theory can be used to help us understand the ecovillage learning experience, particularly when applied to consideration of the socially interactive process of learning how to live and work together. Such theory goes beyond understanding learning as a cognitive process, to consider how learning happens in and across social and cultural constructs, including how people are shaped by their social worlds and have the power to shape them (Niewolny & Wilson, 2009; Worthen, 2014). As Worthen notes, rather than thinking about how people learn in terms of what their brain is doing, '…a person learns a certain way because of how they relate to the world and the social relationships around them' (Worthen, 2014, p. 41).

Russian theorist L. S. Vygotsky introduced many important concepts that influenced and have shaped socio-cultural learning theory today. One such concept was his suggestion that learning occurs through communication, and it is language that mediates this learning (Worthen, 2014). As will be shown later in this paper, language and communication are significant factors in learning how to live and work together in an ecovillage. Another important concept introduced by Vygotsky is the "zone of proximal development" that suggests we learn, by working with others, what we would otherwise not have been able to learn on our own, but also, we learn more rapidly if we work with others that have more expertise (Worthen, 2014). Stemming from this Vygotskian concept is the theory of "situated learning", and the concepts of

"communities of practice" and "legitimate peripheral participation", formulated by Lave and Wenger (1991).

For Lave and Wenger, '…learning is an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world (1991, p. 35)', and the learning experience is influenced by how learners are situated in the social world. Thus, peripherality is a reference to the learners location in the social world, and 'changing locations and perspectives are part of actors' learning trajectories, developing identities, and forms of membership (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 36). Furthermore, Lave and Wenger's interpretation of the zone of proximal development takes a collectivist / societal perspective, placing '…more emphasis on connecting issues of sociocultural transformation with the changing relations between newcomers and old-timers in the context of a changing shared practice (1991, p. 49)'. Lave and Wenger (1991) utilized the term "communities of practice (CoP)" to broadly refer to the sociocultural practices of a community – refraining from being too prescriptive of what might constitute a CoP. However, they originally drew on the study of apprenticeship, to explain how learning happens within the social context of the workplace, and in particular, how knowledge is passed on from workplace veterans (full participants) to newcomers (peripheral participants) through co-participatory training. Central to the concept of CoP is the notion of membership, which is necessary for participation, and consequently, for the learning to occur (Fuller, Hodkinson, Hodkinson & Unwin, 2005). CoP members mutually engage in a joint enterprise, utilizing a common repertoire or competence, gained through knowledge shared in order to improve collective practice (Seaman, 2008). However, as Handley, Sturdy, Finchman and Clark (2006) point out, a CoP should not be viewed as simply an opportunity to learn, through participation and practice, in an instructional sense (e.g. learning a technical skill). Rather, CoPs enable conveyance of less tangible, yet equally important aspects of learning to engage successfully in the community, such as the learning of values and norms. Thus, CoPs could be considered both a socialization process, and a collective, experiential learning process for constructing and gaining competence in common practice. Furthermore, Lave and Wenger (1991) saw legitimate peripheral participation as serving a dual purpose: 1) the development of knowledgeably skilled identities in practice, and 2) the reproduction and transformation of communities of practice. This dual purpose highlights an understanding of learning as an on-going process that occurs in practice, as well as the negotiated and dynamic nature of the community of practice, which Wenger later described to be '…an emergent structure, neither inherently stable nor randomly changeable (1998, p. 49)'. Thus, Wenger portrays learning and social reproduction / transformation in a CoP as cyclical, co-processes, involving the negotiation of meaning (through interpretation and action), participation (through membership in a social community, including identity construction), and reification ('…the process of giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into "thingness" (1998, p. 58)'), which shapes experience, and also enables shaping the community.

While CoPs are a distinct concept within a social theory of practise, some authors point to the conflation of the concept with "learning communities"; thus, with the terms used interchangeably to understand learning as

> …the ongoing refinement of practices and emerging knowledge embodied in the specific action of a particular community. Individuals learn *as* they participate in everyday activity within a community (with its history, assumptions and cultural values, rules, and patterns of relationship), with the tools at hand (including objects, technology, language). (Fenwick, 2008, italics in original, quoted in Merriam & Bierema, 2013, p. 122)

Recent literature on sustainable communities (i.e. eco-communities modelling more sustainable ways of life) has suggested they are communities of practice – sometimes applying the theory articulated by Wenger (1998), or simply using the broader interpretation described above (cf. Bradbury & Middlemiss, 2015; Burke, 2017; Cato, 2014; Poland, Dooris & Haluza-Delay, 2011). While still a very small literature, it certainly points to the relevance of the theory and the possible potential to utilize the CoP concept to explore both the processes of learning and the social co-construction of communities engaged in the various practices of sustainability – communities '…where logics of practice relevant to the triple threat [climate change, peak oil, and ecological degradation] are legitimated and performed (Poland et al., 2011, p. ii208)'.

As a live-work arrangement, organised under the values of cooperation between people, and of people with nature (Litfin, 2014), the ecovillage could be considered a cooperative practice of living well in a defined place. Also, as self-organised and self-governed communities, the ecovillage is intended to be an empowering practice of sustainable living, empowering people both physically and psychologically, which, according to Avelino and Kunze (2009), occurs primarily through "community building", and the community principles of "participating" and "sharing". Findings of the case study presented in the section that follows demonstrate how key social competencies for engaging and sharing within a cooperative culture are developed, not by simple transmission / acquisition, but through on-going participation in the social practices of the ecovillage community.

The case study: Whole Village

Whole Village ecovillage is situated on approximately 200 acres of communally owned agricultural land, just outside the town limits of Orangeville, Ontario, Canada (pop. ~ 30,000), about one hour's drive northwest of the metropolis of Toronto. Approximately 25 people of various ages, including families, singles, and retirees, lived in the community at the time of this study. The majority of Whole Village residents live in Greenhaven – the 11-suite co-housing building – and membership in the Whole Village Property Cooperative (the owner of the land and buildings) is based on a purchase of one of these suites (shareholders are hereafter to referred to as "owners", as is common verbiage in the community). Approximately half of the suites were lived in by owner-members at the time of the study, with the other rented until the suites are sold (which has been years in some cases). Additional residents rent rooms in the farmhouse, which is generally reserved for farmers and interns of the community-supported agriculture (CSA) enterprise.

Other than the CSA, and Bed & Breakfast accommodations offered in two summer-season cabins, there are no businesses at Whole Village. Social labour – i.e. the unpaid, intra-organizational work that is commonly undertaken by members in a cooperative (Quarter, Mook, & Armstrong, 2009) – in the form of expected community service hours, is part of the community agreement at Whole Village. This social labour may involve food production (gardening, preserving, cooking community meals), common household work, land stewardship, and organizational (e.g. facilitation, committee work) or administrative activities (e.g. bookkeeping, note taking). These community service expectations apply to all community members, whether owner or renter.

All decisions of the Cooperative are made using the consensus decision-making process (though a back-up voting system is in place, but has rarely been used). Every

resident can participate in this process, regardless of share status, but only shareholder members have the option to "block" a decision, which essentially means that a proposal cannot proceed. It can take time for a group new to consensus to learn how to use a "block" decision appropriately. According to Butler and Rothstein (2007), a legitimate block must be based on the principles of the group, not of the individual. Therefore, it is impossible for a group to use consensus effectively if they have not established a shared vision/purpose, and principles/values, which focus the group during times of discussion and decision-making (Christian, 2003). Whole Village's founding documents include a stated vision and guiding principles.

Several mandate groups (i.e. committees) – also open to participation of all residents - exist to make operational decisions, develop policy proposals, and organize community social and educational activities. Overall, Whole Village's practices are guided by its primary objective, described as striving to be a community with a 'commitment to sustainability and land stewardship seeking to live together in harmony with each other and with the natural habitat (Whole Village, n.d)'.

Methods

Case study data was obtained during four months of field research at this ecovillage in 2014, and involved document analysis, observations, and eight in-depth interviews of 4 owners and 4 renters. Based on extensive literature review on practices of cooperative culture / sustainable community, key social competencies were identified, and then used as categories for data collection and analysis; these were: inclusive discussion and decision-making; honest and compassionate communication; non-violent conflict management; embracing diversity of people and perspectives; and inner work, such as trying to be less reactive and more reflective. During interviews, case study participants were asked to reflect on how these competencies were supported and/or improved through their participation in the community.

Findings

During the individual interviews, when I asked one of the interviewees whether living in community was hard, the considered response was: 'I don't want life to be about a smooth ride, I want good suspension so I can ride it out'. This case study provided rich data on ecovillager perspectives on what "good suspension" means in the context of community living. In the sections that follow, I focus on the responses of interviewees to highlight learning in relation to the key social competencies of community living. Then, in section 5, I integrate these findings with a discussion on Whole Village as a community of practice.

Discussion and decision-making

Many of the respondents felt that their capacity to participate effectively in community discussions and decision-making was fostered and supported at Whole Village, regardless of whether they came there with very little or significant prior experience in a cooperative community setting. Several respondents suggested Whole Village had established a good, inclusive process for discussion and decision-making, and

commended the consensus process and residents' ability to use it. Some respondents made reference to how personal growth had improved their ability to participate in the process, making statements like: 'I have learned to assert myself'; 'I was so quiet at first no one had any idea what I was thinking, but now I participate', and 'Now I know if I am not heard, that is not ok – I have a right to be heard'. Many of the respondents suggested that their abilities were improved simply through watching and practising, with some being more specific, referring to the regular rotation of meeting facilitation or note-taking duties that enabled practice. One respondent criticised the decision-making process however, stating that use of consensus only works if you have a common vision, and further suggesting a lack of group cohesion in respect to the community's stated vision - that it does not adequately represent the people that live there now. Finally, a common sentiment expressed by renters was that they did have a tendency to 'hold back' during discussion at times, knowing that they did not have a right to block or vote should they be seriously concerned by a decision – which puts into question the level of authentic engagement and inclusivity that the process enables.

Communication

On competencies for honest and compassionate communication, some respondents suggested that their communications skills improved, and that the culture of Whole Village helped to 'grow our capacity for healthy dialogue' through example and practise; as one respondent put it: 'here we learn to tell people the truth, unlike the rest of the world'. However, others suggested that that their ability to communicate well varied from person to person, and thus was reflective of their inter-personal relationships; as one respondent said, 'if you love a person you can be open and honest, and you can take criticism from them'. Also, a few respondents pointed out that honest and compassionate communication were not the same thing, and that while they may be learning to 'be more honest', they are still having some difficulty with 'the compassionate part'. Also, another person suggested that good communication goes beyond being honest and compassionate, as it is about being able to speak so that someone else can 'hear you', which this person noted is not always easy when people come to a conversation with different perspectives.

Respondents mentioned several practices and tools that they felt helped them learn to speak so that someone can "hear" them. One was The Gifting Circle (Christian, 2005) – a forum sometimes used to provide a safe and respectful way to share feelings and perspectives one-on-one, but done in a group setting, with participants rotating through partners. Another was non-violent communication (NVC) – which involves use of language that aims to build compassion and understanding (Rosenberg, 2015). Practising NVC involves formulaic statements along the following lines: 'When I observe X, I feel Y because I need Z. So I'm asking you to do Q (Litfin, 2014, p. 123)'. Some statements were made about NVC being a part of the culture at Whole Village, and therefore, while not everyone expressed confidence at being 'good at it', they felt they had many opportunities to watch and learn from others. Furthermore, a tool used during meetings – a bell or gong-style bowl – was mentioned as helpful, to be used whenever a person feels the discussion is getting too heated and people's perspectives are not being heard. Once the sound maker is used, talking ceases and attendees are expected to sit in silence and reflect on the discussion, until the group is ready to resume the discussion. In addition, a few people mentioned the book "Getting Real" by Susan Campbell (a highly suggested reading in the Whole Village membership package), as a

resource that helped them understand what honest and compassionate communication is all about.

Despite all of the support identified for fostering honest and compassionate communications at Whole Village, many respondents suggested this is an area where it is easy to 'slip up'. One respondent felt that the challenge lay in a failure to practise ('we have the tools but we don't practise enough'), but also acknowledged that group competence varies as people come to the community at different times and may not have not been around when a particular skill set was being actively developed (e.g. a time period when monthly discussions were organized around the 10 skills for effective communication identified in "Getting Real"). In addition, some respondents suggested that open and honest communication was impacted somewhat by personality types (e.g. 'I find it difficult to be honest with some people – they're too sensitive'; 'some of us can only do it in contrived settings, like the gifting circle'). Also, as another respondent pointed out, the effectiveness of all these tools really depends on each individual's willingness to change their own behaviour. Finally, while most people felt that Whole Village fostered honest communication by creating an environment that discouraged gossip / talking behind people's backs, others felt that 'a good rant' was helpful once in a while to help them 'sort things out', and then to be able to engage in a conflict situation with more compassion.

Conflict resolution

The majority of respondents felt that the ability to manage conflict non-violently was fostered and supported at Whole Village. Several respondents made reference to specific processes that support conflict resolution, such as activities organized by the Community Dynamics Mandate Group (CDMG) that are incorporated into community meetings, and the support provided by CDMG members (e.g. if a conflict cannot be resolved by the involved parties, CDMG members will step in and assist). In addition, several residents were mentioned as having particularly good process skills, and who acted as process coaches for discussion, decision-making and conflict resolution.

Also, there was reference made to needing to learn the appropriate time and place to address conflict issues. For instance, one respondent suggested that waiting until the weekly "check-in" meeting was inappropriate, especially if it meant that feelings about the issue had time to fester. Others suggested that full community forums may be inappropriate places to address inter-personal conflicts, as the individuals involved may feel 'under attack' in a group setting, and it could be perceived as 'dumping your emotional baggage on everyone'.

Again, personal growth was mentioned by several respondents in respect to the development of their conflict resolution abilities; for instance: 'I don't run away as much now', and 'I'm learning I can disagree with someone and still care about them'. In addition, there was mention of the important role that building understanding and trusting relationships – a process that can take some time – plays in supporting the communication necessary for non-violent conflict resolution. For instance, as one respondent suggested, 'you can be freer around people you've known for a long time'. Several others mentioned "The Gifting Circle", if regularly practised, as contributing to the alleviation of inter-personal conflicts. Finally, if the conflict resulted from miscommunication, one respondent suggested that the best way to deal with it is, 'to take ownership for your miscommunications, then let it go'.

Embracing diversity

There were varied opinions on how well diversity of people and perspectives were fostered and supported at Whole Village. In respect to people, several respondents noted that they thought they did 'pretty well' in respect to age, gender and sexual diversity, but that they were not 'quite diverse enough', with several specifically referencing ethnic diversity as an area where they were challenged. Furthermore, in respect to diversity of people, one person suggested that the economic structure of the community, which realistically made securing permanent residency at Whole Village affordable only for retirees with adequate finances and professionals who earned a living off-site, meant that it was essentially impossible to foster long-term economic diversity.

Respondents did not address the issue of diversity of perspectives significantly, though there appeared to be a general sense that they naturally fostered a diversity of perspectives through the consensus decision-making process. However, one respondent did say that 'it feels like different perspectives are scary for some people'. Also, another made a distinction between the practices of living together and working together when suggesting that it may be easier to accept differences in perspectives when you're on some sort of committee (i.e. a work setting), but that is gets harder when dealing with matters of living together because its more intimate.

Personal growth

A large part of engaging well in community appears to be dependent on how you react to and relate to others. When asked about whether or not they had become less reactive since living at Whole Village, the majority of those who identified as being highly reactive expressed that they found it was very difficult to change this inclination, despite being in a supportive environment; as one respondent put it: 'it's hard to change life-long patterns'. Additionally, one person stated 'I feel like I'm being more reactive since I came here', making reference to the additional "triggers" of community living that resulted both from specific tensions and simply from a greater number of interactions that result from living closely with people.

In respect to the fostering of reflectivity, the majority of respondents felt that they were already quite reflective before they came to Whole Village, or were inspired to reflect more on their behaviour since living there, with only two admitting that they were probably 'not reflective enough'. One respondent mentioned The Gifting Circle specifically, as a community activity that has caused them to be more reflective, stating that '"powerful" is not part of my self-image, but I have learned (through the gifting circle) that what I say can hurt people, so I need to be able to reflect on my own behaviour'. However, one respondent suggested that reflection can sometimes be difficult, especially when you are feeling vulnerable and in 'self-defence mode'. Two respondents identified a strategy they have learned at Whole Village that has helped them to be both less reactive and more reflective, particularly when conflict arises: 'never assume bad intent'. Another suggested it would be helpful if everyone took up meditation, so that everyone could come 'more fully to the table'.

The responses provided by interviewees made it clear that social competencies were supported through community practices and developed through their everyday engagement in community life. The learning process – for both community newcomers and relative old timers (Wenger, 1998) – will be articulated further below, drawing from an understanding of the concept of communities of practice.

Discussion - Whole Village as community of practice

The newcomer experience

When you first move to Whole Village, you have to figure out how things work. The initiation period is an intensive, immersion learning that may be cognitively and emotionally challenged by the unfamiliar, including the realization that how you have become accustomed to doing things elsewhere (everything from the mundane, like laundry – to the complex, like decision making), just does not work the same way here. Negotiating this process as a newcomer is like entering into a community of practice, where the practices, values, norms and relationships of the community are learned (Handley et al., 2006), and where Whole Village becomes both the context for learning, and the object of learning (i.e. learning the practice of living "in community"). During the first few months of living at Whole Village newcomers learn, with the assistance of veteran community members, the community's practices (e.g. collective food growing, purchasing and common meals) and the processes (e.g. the consensus-based decision making process used at meetings), as well as what is expected of them (e.g. show up to weekly 'check-in' and monthly Meetings of the Round; sign-up for a common area cleaning job), and how to engage with others using nonviolent communication. These practices and processes, as well as the formal community documents (e.g. vision statement, guiding principles, policies, guidance documents), reify the community's value of cooperative culture.

The community has developed tools and processes that assist the newcomer to integrate and operate successfully within the community, such as the Orientation Package that contains a copy of all Whole Village bylaws and policies, the Participation Expectations document, and the Community Covenant (that includes guidance on how to 'strive to be the best version of myself'). New residents are also assigned a mentor to help them understand how things 'get done' in the community, including how to navigate the community's governance system and procedures (e.g. who to ask if you want to keep bees). In addition, the mentor may provide insight on the politics and culture of the community, which helps the newcomer navigate community sensitivities (e.g. figuring out why certain things are done in a certain way before making a suggestion on how you would do it differently), inter-personal relations, and invisible structures of power. These resources available to newcomers support their "participation" in the community, which Wenger (1998) articulated as part of the process of constructing "identities" in relation to those communities; in other words, the support provided by the community to acclimatize to, and take part in, the community's culture and practices, is part of the newcomer's process of developing an identity of "ecovillager" and competent member in a community engaged in the construction and enactment of cooperative culture.

The on-going process of learning to live "in community"

While the process of initiation into the Whole Village community may appear to be largely adaptive, the case study findings revealed that the learning of community practices – particularly as they relate to social competencies – is an on-going, dynamic process. Throughout interviewee responses on social competency development, various references were made to both informal and organized ways that these competencies were fostered or supported by community practices. For instance, organised approaches included: group study (e.g. discussion of suggested readings), organised activities (e.g. community dynamics exercises during meetings), established processes (e.g. conflict

resolution), the practice of rotating roles (e.g. facilitation; note-taking), monitoring the meeting of accomplishments (e.g. the points system used for kitchen work), and the use of experts (e.g. group process consultants they had hired to teach NVC or to help resolve conflicts, using role play for example). However, informal interactions and the 'culture of Whole Village' was also frequently referenced as a contributor to how learning happened in the social context, by watching others and regular practice. One respondent summed up the difference between the organised and informal / cultural practices as follows: 'through the formal ways I've learned the specifics about how to live in [this] community and through the informal ways I've learned the bigger picture stuff - how to *be* in community'. In addition, while the social environment was identified as a contributor to the development of cooperative live-work competencies, interviewees also pointed to the influence of the inter-personal relationships, their personalities, and their willingness to look at their own behaviour and make changes if necessary, as either supportive or inhibitive for the development of competencies to live and work in community. As several respondents pointed out, building social competence within the cooperative culture of the community is a slow, and often all-consuming process.

The impact of marginal participation

The case study revealed that learning social competencies at Whole Village was an integral part of newcomer experience, supported by community resources and practices, and that the learning process was largely believed to be never ending, thus also an integral part of the experience of full members in this CoP. However, the case study also revealed a potential barrier to becoming a "socially competent being" and developing an identity of "full participant" in this CoP. Renters expressed a tendency to moderate their interactions based on their real and perceived position of being relatively less powerful, which, in essence, could impact their learning trajectory and relegate them to the position of "peripheral participant".

When discussing the notion of "legitimate peripheral participation", Lave and Wenger (1991) described it, not as an inherently negative or marginal position within a community, but rather, as an "opening" – a means to access the resources of the community and to develop understanding through growing involvement in the community. However, they also considered the possibility of marginal participation, i.e. 'alienation from full participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 42)' that might result from unequal positions of power within a community, and thus, which might '…truncate possibilities for identities of mastery (*ibid*)'. Such marginal non-participation (Wenger, 1998) did appear evident, to some extent, in the experience of renters within the Whole Village community of practice (related to the social practice of discussion and decision-making, most specifically). In one case it was revealed quite literally by a renter when they described their positional identity within the community as one of "placeholder", residing there only until someone came along who could afford to buy the suite. This evidence suggests the existence of a structural barrier to the construction of an identity of competence.

The existence of such a structural barrier to identity construction may be one of individual concern for the participant, but it is also one of communal concern. The concept of communities of practice links participation and identity construction to the on-going reproduction and transformation of the community. Enacting a cooperative culture – which includes a foundational notion of inclusivity – is heavily challenged, I would suggest, by a structural barrier to participation, as appears evident at Whole

Village. Thus, it could mean that the ultimate objective of this CoP is being undermined, which puts into question the sustainability of this community – a problem for everyone involved.

Conclusion

In attempting to create a low-materialism, communal live-work arrangement, ecovillages develop practices of living well in place. Central to these practices is the creation and enactment of cooperative culture, including the social competencies necessary for living and working together. These competencies – inclusive discussion and decision-making, honest and compassionate communication, non-violent conflict resolution, embracing diversity of people and perspectives, and undertaking the necessary personal growth work that supports the outer-focused practices of cooperative culture – though generally not given much thought in the sustainability literature, with its focus on socio-technical practices (e.g. switching to renewable energy use), may actually be key to supporting the community-building that some would argue is foundational to sustainability (Litfin, 2014). This paper has shown how the concept of 'communities of practice', first articulated by Lave and Wenger (1991), and stemming from the socio-cultural theory of situated learning, provides a way to understand how these social competencies are learned through membership and participation in the ecovillage. Understanding this learning process provides crucial insight into a part of a much broader process of education and learning for a transition to sustainability. Given the usefulness of the concept of communities of practice for understanding the learning processes involved in developing the practice of cooperative living at Whole Village, I would recommend this approach for broader application, to consider how ecovillages foster learning for sustainability, and how they practise living well "in place", from all aspects of the ecovillage model of sustainability – ecological, social, economic, and worldview (GEESE, 2012).

Important to consider however, is the role that power inequality may play in a sustainability practice. The Whole Village case study showed that practising sustainability – specifically, the interactive practices of cooperative culture - can be undermined by structural barriers that may inhibit moving peripheral participants toward full membership in the community. Ironically, in the case of Whole Village – a community engaged in practices of economic communalism as a means to resist and create alternatives to the dominant, ecologically –devastating practices of capitalism and consumerism – a barrier to full participation in their practices is rooted in the economics of the community; specifically, the high cost of living and low-income potential of small-scale, ecological food production – two factors that, combined, put the possibility of suite purchase out of reach for many of the renters at Whole Village. That these factors reflect the broader socio-economic landscape within which the community is embedded, points to what Baker (2013) succinctly identified as the challenge of trying to build a sustainable community in an unsustainable world.

Trying to enact radical alternatives within a broader context that is at odds with what is trying to be enacted is a common condition for any radical experiment; one that may be insurmountable for utopian experiments, as was the case for many an intentional community of past (Brown, 2002). However, the existence of ecovillages – some new start-ups, some reinventions of communities that began in the 1960s (Dawson, 2006) – shows the enduring persistence of "active hope" (Macy & Johnstone, 2012) in the possibility of more sustainable ways of living. And what is needed in addition to hope,

are commitment and patience. As Cato posits, 'In terms of sustainability learning… we are all apprentices, we are all learning together and learning to live sustainably is going to be a project of several generations at least (2014, p. 18)' – a learning that can be supported, transformed, and reproduced within inter-generational communities of practice.

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Learning alterity in the social economy: the case of the Local Organic Food Co-ops Network in Ontario, Canada

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Abstract

While the origins of the social economy date long before the period of industrialization or the modern state (Shragge & Fontan, 2000), it is growing in importance as we find ourselves in 'the cancer stage of capitalism' (McMurtry, 2013). Facing issues such as exponentially growing inequality, the demise of rural communities, an exploding obesity epidemic and jobless recoveries from repeated financial crises, more and more people are turning to the social economy for solutions to their problems (see McMurtry, 2010; Mook et al,. 2010). This paper reports on a pilot study that focused on the Local Organic Food Co-ops Network, created by people who oppose the industrial food system and want to specialize in local, organic food. Adopting a political-economy lens to understand this opposition through the words of participants, the study employed semi-structured interviews to explore the learning dimensions of this social economy organization. The study found that respondents participated in social learning and learned alterity in the social economy. The paper concludes that social economy organizations need to prioritize social over economic values, and the potential for change associated with social learning is key to making this choice.

Keywords: alterity; co-operatives; learning; social economy; social learning

Introduction

Although learning has been associated with a number of distinctively neutral meanings, such as receiving, storing, retrieving and using knowledge, it has also been connected to a change in behaviour or the potential for change (Taylor, 2005). Learning and change have a long, interconnected history, particularly in terms of social movements. The labour movement, women's movements, the gay rights movement and the civil rights

movement have all been fecund sites of learning that have spawned enormous social change, leading to the term 'social movement learning' (Hall, 2006).

A number of social movements have also been directly involved in what is known as the social economy – 'economic activity neither controlled directly by the state nor by the profit logic of the market; activity that prioritizes the social well-being of communities and marginalized individuals over partisan political directives or individual gain' (McMurtry, 2010, p. 31). For example, the fair trade movement prioritizes the well-being of farmers in developing countries, while operating both in, as well as against, the capitalist market (Raynolds, 2002). Like many other actors in the social economy, these farmers are active learners who contribute to change not only in their own communities, but also in the developed world.

Co-operatives provide another example of a social movement that is directly involved in the social economy – their economic activity prioritizes the social well-being of members and the communities they live in. Like the fair trade movement, the co-operative movement operates both in, as well as against, the neoliberal market and many co-op members are active learners (MacPherson, 2002). One particular group of co-operatives in the province of Ontario, Canada, has distinguished itself as a hotbed of learning and change: the Local Organic Food Co-ops (LOFC) Network.

This research paper will focus on learning in the LOFC Network, based on a pilot study carried out in 2015. It will begin with a description of the LOFC Network, followed by a brief outline of the study, then hone in on the learning dimensions of this social economy organization. It will connect this learning to what Goodman, Dupuis and Goodman (2014, p. 82) refer to as alterity, by which they mean 'the transition between reflexivity and routine, which describes the passage from individual reflexivity to the collective action needed to resolve contradictions between ethical and political values and the patterns of daily life in conventional food systems'. To illustrate their point, they call on Brunori, Guidi and Rossi's (2008) analysis of innovations by both producers and consumers in new provisioning networks, who scale up values that underpin individual reflexive consumption (i.e., consumption carried out by critical, self-aware actors who articulate values in their everyday routines) into a form of organized social practice. According to Goodman et al. (2014), these successful alternative experiments act as demonstration sites that can, in turn, stimulate further restructuring of both daily patterns and technologies of distribution and consumption. Such alterity is at the heart of alternative food networks (AFNs), of which the LOFC Network is an inspiring model – using the social economy to forge a working alternative to the industrial food system and learning to bring social values to the forefront of their practice.

The Local Organic Food Co-ops Network

The Local Organic Food Co-ops (LOFC) Network is a coalition of co-operatives that focus on locally and sustainably produced food in the province of Ontario. Beginning with a group of 18 co-ops in 2010, the LOFC Network now includes over 75 active co-ops and continues to grow. It came about as a result of a meeting organized by the Ontario Co-operative Association, a non-profit organization that provides resources and a common voice for Ontario credit unions and cooperatives (On Co-op, n.d.). The purpose of the meeting was to bring together a number of new co-operatives with three established co-ops to encourage information sharing and potential collaboration. After a follow-up meeting a year later, the Local Organic Food Co-ops Network was born,

hosted by the Ontario Natural Food Co-op, and a network animator was hired. Essentially, the LOFC Network links cooperatively structured food and farming enterprises in the province of Ontario: 'Through the sharing of information and exploration of innovations in food-based social enterprise, the co-ops are co-creating the network as a platform for internal strengthening and province-wide collaboration' (Renglich, 2012).

The purpose of the LOFC Network reflects its status as part of both the co-operative movement and the social economy: to educate about and advocate for local and organic agriculture and food co-ops; to facilitate and support the growth of existing co-ops; and to connect and scale-up toward regional food processing and distribution hubs (LOFC Network, 2013). A variety of organizational models exists within the Network—farmer-owned, eater-owned, worker-owned, and multi-stakeholder—but all the co-ops within the Network have six common characteristics that aim to contribute to the establishment of a sustainable food system:

1. Bringing local farmers and eaters closer together;

2. Growing and supplying fresh, healthy food locally;

3. Keeping money in the community;

4. Trading fairly, whether domestically or internationally;

5. Saving energy, building the soil, and protecting water; and

6. Celebrating good food, culture, and community (LOFC Network, 2013).

One distinguishing characteristic of the LOFC Network is its combination of three social movements: the co-operative movement, the local food movement and the organic movement. This alliance building has made it an incubator for learning alterity in the social economy, such as alternative business structures, co-operation and new supply chains.

The study

This research paper is based on a pilot study of the LOFC Network that was funded by an Institutional Grant awarded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council and administered through OISE/University of Toronto. It involved conducting semi-structured interviews with seven people involved in six co-ops (Garden City Food Co-operative, Eat Local Sudbury, On the Move Organics, The Mustard Seed Co-op, The Karma Project, and Karma Co-op), plus the animator of the LOFC Network. Five interviews were conducted face to face and three by telephone, using the same set of open-ended questions. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, and the final part of the interview focused on what respondents had learned by being part of a co-operative network. Participants were co-op managers chosen by the animator and represent a mix of old and new co-ops from around the province. While this sampling strategy is not necessarily representative of all the co-ops in the LOFC Network, it does provide a rich picture of the learning dimensions of the Network, while laying the groundwork for a larger study.

Findings

The learning reported by participants in this pilot study falls into a number of recognized learning categories: co-operative learning, instrumental learning, skills building and sharing, and community learning. Although these categories may overlap to some degree, for the purpose of this paper they are discussed separately.

By far the largest category of learning was co-operative learning – not only learning about and through co-operatives, but also simply learning to co-operate instead of compete. MacPherson (2002, p. 10) described co-operative learning as including the following aspects: 'dispensing information, providing training, encouraging reflection, creating knowledge and facilitating learning,' all within a co-operative framework. One participant highlighted this kind of learning when she exclaimed that being part of her co-op was probably the best job she'd ever had, 'in terms of learning how to organize, learning how to sell, learning how to sell memberships. Learning how to be democratic'. She also learned what it means to be part of a network of co-ops and how to run meetings and generate ideas for annual general meetings (AGMs). From the LOFC Network, she learned 'everything about being a co-op,' which she felt would be impossible without the Network support. Another participant mentioned the lessons she learned at the AGMs, which she could bring back to her co-op right away and start applying. This same person emphasized the importance of the knowledge of peers in the Network – she could easily get feedback and advice on how to do things differently or better, so she did not have to 'reinvent the wheel'.

While one participant learned all about worker co-ops, two co-participants learned about the local focus as well as lessons from more established co-operatives. These same participants also spoke about shared learning among LOFC Network members, such as how to produce a newsletter, which gives 'a big boost' to those who have neither the time nor the resources to learn this on their own. They also spoke about the 'really big challenge and learning curve' of staying financially viable as a co-operative business, so they could achieve their other goals, and about learning policy governance as management board members, which the LOFC Network helped them with. Another participant discussed her learning around communication and conversation with respect to co-op meetings, and in particular learning to 'appreciate that sometimes communication is quiet'.

One participant explained that, 'my learning in co-ops is that it's not just you'. She went on to explain that 'co-ops ask you always to look at the ripple. Look at if you do that how many generations, how many other downtowns, how many other farmers are going to be affected by that?' For her, this entails learning from other people's perspectives, 'learning to listen' and 'learning to share'. In addition, 'learning how to use the conversations and the communication and all of those "co" things that co-operatives breed and putting it in a personal level, I think it's growing me as a human being'.

When asked about some of the lessons he had learned from his role in the co-op and the Network, another participant talked about 'bridging that gap between business necessity and activism – you have to find a balance'. He went on to explain that through his association with the co-op and the Network, there was 'no doubt in my mind that the co-operative model is the future. It is a decent solution at least for now to capitalism and that is the most sustainable direction to go, whether we're serving people local food or we're building them a bicycle – co-ops are definitely the future'.

An inspiring example of co-operative learning was referred to by a number of participants. At the 2013 AGM, one of the longest-running food co-ops in the province

announced that it was on the verge of closing. The other co-ops in the network quickly organized a rescue session and each committed to help the ailing co-op survive; the animator was tasked with ensuring that each co-op carried out its commitment. The result was not only a reversal of the fortunes of this co-op, but also a realization among the members of the LOFC Network that 'we felt like that was the moment we became a network. Because here was a group that was asking for help and sharing their vulnerabilities and that let us jump in'. One participant summed up the kind of co-operative learning associated with the LOFC Network when she observed that she not only learned at the AGM, but also, 'when we go and visit other co-ops and learn from them, we thrive and I think they also learn from us'.

A second category of learning found in this study involves instrumental learning. Derived from Habermas' (1978) concept of instrumental knowledge, instrumental learning is goal-directed and 'comprises ways to control the environment, predicting physical events, and managing reality' (Cranton, 2013, p. 98). One participant described how she learned what it means to be a buyer and understand 'shipments of food and crates and pallets and haystack deals and SKUs [stock keeping units]'. When reflecting on what she had learned, another participant brought up a number of practical learnings:

> …from like, where to buy toilet paper, to like how do you do your books, and you know how you deal with HR issues, how you integrate membership into like get membership engaged in the co-op, and how to do governance sessions with the board of directors, and all sorts of management strategies as well as just functional operations, day to day operations, saying like oh like if I switch this around and I do things this way it can be way more efficient.

Another participant who was involved in the renovation of a building to house the new co-operative learned 'all kinds of things about building codes and how to work with tradespeople and how not to work with tradespeople and how never to trust a plumber'. In terms of instrumental knowledge, this person felt that she 'learned something every day' from managing a website to organizing policies and procedures within the co-op.

A third, and associated, category of learning found in this study is skills building and sharing. Rigby and Sanchis (2006) remind us that while discussions of skills tend to focus on such areas as technical/professional dimensions, manipulation and knowledge associated with the techniques of the work process, they are also socially constructed. This means that learning skills involves both technical and social processes, which was clearly evident in the study. For example, one participant discussed the governance of her co-op and the skill building required to enact this governance: '…this is a working board and the committees work and I see different people doing new things and getting lots of different skills'. Another participant talked about peer-to-peer workshops and skill sharing within the Network, while also learning how to manage and maintain a website. Another participant brought up the subject of learning overload – with board members having to learn so many new skills that they were becoming exhausted.

A fourth category of adult learning found in this study is community learning. Falk and Harrison (1998, p. 614) describe community learning as a 'broad name for those individual and group processes which not only produce, but also *sustain* community development outcomes'. In terms of community development, they argue, 'little progress can be made and then sustained without the oil of the community learning mechanisms being put in place to achieve the smoothly operating machine of socio-cultural, economic and environmental outcomes' (pp. 611-612). In other words, community learning smooths the path of development.

When asked what she had learned, one participant responded in terms of learning with respect to two types of community: the community of the co-operative and the larger community of St. Catharines. First, as different board members learned new skills, they came together and solved problems: 'We're building a little community, and we're starting, we're trying to solve problems, and I think people feel empowered. I feel empowered; I'm not just sitting back and complaining'. With respect to the larger community, she learned that people were not apathetic, contrary to her expectations: '…ultimately, I learned a lot about the community, and got to know people and got to have a better appreciation of St. Catharines that I didn't have before'.

Data from the interviews also provides evidence of the co-operatives being centres of learning for people not directly involved in organizing and running them. For example, one participant talked about educating members about the food system and inviting farmers, nutritionists and environmentalists to come in and educate consumers. She also spoke about the importance of such teaching tools as labels and emailed newsletters. Another participant explained that her co-op offered 6 to 10 workshops every year on such diverse subjects as the meaning of organic, how to make bread, and bookkeeping, and hosted conferences for market gardeners, while also launching a co-operative UPC code program for producers. She also mentioned that her co-op organizes farm tours, as well as co-ordinating 'volunteers to go and work on farms to learn how to farm as well as to assist farmers with whatever they may need help with'.

The learning associated with the LOFC Network is operationalized through different means, including the aforementioned workshops, conferences, AGMs, farm tours and listserv, as well as other means of learning such as webinars, regional cluster meetings and "virtual campfires" – phone conferences where people assemble and chat. Organized and co-ordinated by the animator, they are a chance for co-ordinators or managers of co-ops to get together informally, with no particular topic, and talk about various issues of mutual interest.

Discussion: the learning dimensions of the Local Organic Food Co-ops Network

Overall, the categories of learning in the LOFC Network can be broadly described as social learning, defined by Finger and Verlaan (1995, p. 505) as 'collective and collaborative learning that links the biophysical to the social, cultural, and political spheres, the local to the global arena, and action to reflection and research'. Social learning begins and ends with action – understood as purposeful activity – which often involves change, including modelling new roles and behaviour (Friedmann, 1987; Merriam and Caffarella, 1999). Participants in the study were certainly involved in purposeful activity – setting up and/or running co-operatives that specialize in local, organic food, while building a network designed to help them to meet their collective needs. They were also focused on democratic change, particularly in the food system, by countering the prevalence of nutrient-poor, highly processed 'edible food-like substances' (Pollan, 2008, p. 1) or 'pseudo-foods' (Winson, 2013, 25) with fresh, local, organic food. In doing so, they were modelling new roles as co-op managers and network members, and modelling new behaviours, such as co-operation, democratic participation, fairness and transparency. For example, as members of co-operatives and the LOFC Network, the participants are modelling co-operation. As one participant pointed out, 'because it's a co-op network, it's amazing how much people share information differently than through a normal business network. There's just not nearly the competition or protecting sort of your intellectual property'. In terms of democracy,

co-operatives are democratic workplaces – one person, one vote – so members are learning and modelling democratic behaviour by participating in decision-making. In the words of one participant, 'there isn't a major decision that doesn't get made by consensus.' Unlike many other co-operatives, fairness is one of the pillars of the LOFC Network. This is particularly true in the realm of trade: while most fair trade programs only involve farmers in developing countries (who form co-operatives as part of their fair-trade agreement), the LOFC Network espouses fair trade for all farmers, so they can make a living wage. And, finally, transparency is central to the LOFC Network. Many people have become alienated or distanced from their food (Kneen, 1993), and know little about what they are consuming. The LOFC Network aims to educate people by bringing farmers and eaters closer together.

Social learning, like all forms of learning, has negative as well as positive aspects. Spencer and Lange (2014) remind us that not all learning is socially beneficial, citing examples of learning to use cocaine or learning how to con pensioners. The social values of the LOFC Network, and of the social economy in general, help to steer members' learning in positive directions. No evidence was found in the study of socially unbeneficial learning, but a future study could investigate this further. Another facet of social learning involves the question of power – 'one of the fundamental realities of human experience' (Nesbit & Wilson, 2005, 496). In spite of the ubiquity of social learning, some always have more opportunities or skills than others do, which can affect the equality of people who work together. Through its AGMs, listserv and virtual campfires, the LOFC Network encourages its members to share knowledge and resources, thus helping to iron out power differences that could become exacerbated in a more competitive environment.

Church's (2001) three dimensions of social learning begin to address some of these complex aspects:

1. *Solidarity learning.* Learning that takes place not according to an explicit curriculum but spontaneously and unpredictably through social interactions that foster people's participation.

2. *Reshaping the definition of self.* Learning in which participants build new identities, rethinking who they are in relation to society.

3. *Organizational learning.* Learning that involves the ways in which community organizations come to understand how to operate and position themselves within an entrepreneurial culture while continuing to carry forward their historical concerns for social and economic justice (Church 2001, p. 3).

In terms of solidarity learning, participants in the study learned spontaneously and unpredictably through the myriad social interactions inherent in being both a co-operative and a member of the LOFC Network. They learned how to co-operate on many levels, they learned practical, everyday things, they learned to develop and share skills, and they learned about community. As for reshaping the definition of self, many learned to become responsible board members, successful business people, valued community members or better human beings. And in terms of organizational learning,

some of the participants learned to find the balance between financial survival and ethical commitment – a task made easier by the support and encouragement offered through the Network.

Wildemeersch and Jansen (1997, p. 2) go so far as to understand social learning as "a particular way of framing reality," seeing it as not only action- and experience-oriented, but also characterized by critical reflection, interaction and communication, multi-actorship and social responsibility. Participants in the study clearly engaged in critical reflection about the dominant food system, and the co-operative form of the Network encouraged interaction and communication. Multi-actorship was inherent in the Network, as was social responsibility, described by Wildemeersch and Jansen (1997) as encompassing the reinvention of ethical and political considerations. Participants in the study felt able to prioritize their ethical commitments and social values while aligning their politics with their working life.

The social learning dimensions of the LOFC Network bring to mind Senge's (1990) definition of a learning organization, which possesses adaptive capacity and generativity, and the ability to create alternative futures. Bolstered by participants' engagement with co-operative learning, instrumental learning, skills building and sharing, and community learning, the Network grew quickly and overcame the inevitable challenges associated with rapid expansion, adapting to the local food environment and establishing a niche for its products and its people. In addition, the nature of the Network is such that it encourages the generation of ideas and practice, crucial to both adaptive capacity and the creation of alternative futures – the aim of the social economy. In the words of Shragge and Fontan (2000, p. 9), 'A social economy implies the basic reorientation of the whole economy and related social institutions'.

This basic reorientation can be facilitated by the social learning involved in what are referred to as communities of practice, defined by Wenger (2011, p. 1) as "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly". Wenger posits three characteristics of communities of practice: the domain, the community and the practice. First, communities of practice have an identity defined by a shared domain of interest. Second, members participate in joint activities and discussions, help each other and share information. Third, members of a community of practice are practitioners who develop a shared practice through sharing resources such as experiences, stories, tools and ways of addressing recurring problems. According to Wenger, developing these three characteristics simultaneously cultivates a community of practice. Participants in the study would qualify as a community of practice because they simultaneously share a common domain of interest – local, organic food – form a community through their activities and mutual support, and develop a shared practice through sharing a range of resources.

Social learning and communities of practice are particularly pertinent to the area of food. For example, as mentioned earlier, Brunori et al. (2008) analyse the myriad of innovations by both producers and consumers in alternative food networks (AFNs) as a collective process of social learning to scale up the values that underlie individual reflexive consumption into organized social practice. Goodman et al. (2014) reinforce the point, arguing that patterns of social practice embedded in AFNs co-evolve through social learning, adding that producers and consumers need to gain both new and revived knowledges and skills before these novel patterns can be normalized in everyday routines. The LOFC Network is scaling up the social values that have driven participants to form a local, organic food co-op and join the Network. Through the listserv, AGMs and regional meetings, individual co-ops are praised and encouraged to live their values and make them normal social practice, while setting an example for the

others in the Network. Friedmann's (2017) use of communities of food practice applies particularly to the LOFC Network. Not only does it encompass Wenger's (2011) conceptualization of communities of practice, but also links it directly to food. For Friedmann (2017, p. 28), communities of food practice consist of "networks of individuals and organizations – public, private, and non-profit – engaged in creating a regional, integrated, inclusive agri-food economy".

The social learning exhibited by participants in the study can be viewed through the lens of alterity – transitioning from their individual reflexivity with respect to the industrial food system, which prompted them to create or join a co-operative that specialized in local, organic food, to the collective action of establishing and maintaining the Network. This not only reinforces their reflexive choice to create or join a co-op, but also helps to resolve the contradiction between their values and the normalized economic, social and environmental transgressions of the industrial food system. In practice, this alterity springs from what Goodman et al. (2014) describe as developing new ways of doing things that do not directly oppose the hegemonic capitalist system, but coexist with it and attempt to change it from within. By establishing a closely linked network of local, organic food co-ops across the province, which aim to, as much as possible, source from and sell to each other and a committed public, they are forging a social economy alternative within the industrial food system. Whether the fledgling Network can actually change this system remains to be seen, as the number of members continues to grow.

This social economy alternative is as important to create as it is difficult. People have strong social, cultural and emotional affiliations with food from the industrial food system and those affiliations are not easily severed. And yet, the system is broken (Scharf, Levkoe and Saul, 2010; Baker, Campsie and Rabinowiez, 2010) or on the road to collapse (Fraser and Rimas, 2010), creating hunger and obesity in equal measure while inflicting cruelty to animals and laying waste to the planet. This unsustainable food system is, in essence, an evolutionary dead end that must be replaced by more sustainable systems. Sustainability, however, does not come naturally; it must be learned (Sumner, 2007). This is the goal of learning alterity in the social economy. The social learning exhibited by participants in this study models how the rest of us can not only 'learn our way out' (Röling, 2000) of this unsustainable food system but also learn our way in to more sustainable food systems.

Learning alterity in the social economy is not without problems. As Goodman et al. (2014) point out, the market embeddedness of many AFNS limits their strategic options and manoeuvring room. Indeed, they argue, their implication in capitalist commodity markets can hardly be regarded as oppositional, leaving the values inscribed in their commodities as somehow alternative to the faceless, placeless foods of the industrial food system – values that are open to mainstream capture and assimilation (consider, for example, the contested meaning of 'organic'). This leads them to ask, alterity for whom? Otherwise put, 'the social relations of consumption of market-oriented "alternative" food networks have long been ignored by those asserting their alterity' (p. 84). While these authors maintain that this does not negate the work of AFNs, they contend that social justice is the Achilles heel of these networks because the poor and the disadvantaged continue to be ill served.

Evidence of this Achilles heel can be found in the LOFC Network. The food produced by many of the co-ops in the Network is beyond the access of poor and disadvantaged people. And yet, a number of co-ops are learning alterity by working toward basic food security. For example, the Fort Albany First Nation on James Bay, in conjunction with the non-profit LOFC Network member True North Co-op, has been

working with FoodShare Toronto (a non-profit organization that promotes food security) to bring fresh food to remote northern Canadian communities at an affordable price (LOFC Network, 2012). A formidable role model can be found in the Mandela Foods Co-operative, a non-profit workers' co-op in West Oakland, California, that serves low-income neighbourhoods and sources much of its produce from local, minority farmers (www.mandelafoods.com). Its mission is to "strengthen community health, integrity, and identity by providing economic opportunity and empowerment for inner-city Oakland residents and businesses, and local family farms" (www.reimaginerpe.org/cj/dharvey). For both examples, foregrounding their social values and circumventing the profit motive in food takes them out of the capitalist orbit and forges the beginnings of a non-profit food system – the foundation of a sustainable food system (Sumner, 2016).

It is examples like this that hearten Goodman et al. (2014) to look to what they refer to as the 'politics of practice' that underlie 'the accelerating growth and eclectic range of mutual forms of social enterprise organizations and community-owned food projects' (p. 247). For these authors, the emerging and diverse social economy of food 'opens up political opportunities to create possible worlds beyond the reach of heavily market-embedded movements' (p. 248), such as the establishment of sustainable food networks in low-income urban neighbourhoods or food-insecure rural communities, particularly in the far north. In effect, these organizations are '*decentring the economic* – as profit making and other related market constraints – and *restoring the social* to the forefront' (p. 248). In the new social economy of food, they see co-operatives making a difference. Although co-ops may only affect a relatively small number of people in particular places, the authors emphasize the multiplier effects of such organizations 'in disseminating new ways of knowing, growing and organizing food using *horizontal* networks of knowledge sharing and learning'. Adding that many small acts can have cumulative, and even radical, effects on the social control of food provision, they conclude by reminding us about 'the social injustice of the many excluded and "missing guests at the table" set by alternative food and fair trade movements' (p. 249). This is the challenge, but also the promise, of social economy organizations like the LOFC Network.

Conclusion

Like fair trade, the social economy operates both within and against the market, offering an alternative while still being embedded within the capitalist economy. In the words of Goodman et al. (2014, p. 83), organizations in the social economy 'sit somewhat uneasily between the private sector and the state, between market and non-market relations, and profit-making and non-profit structures, often combining elements of each'. While the economic values of these organizations may be similar to market values, their social values stand in stark contrast to the individual, self-serving values championed by the capitalist economy. These social values must come to the fore and supersede economic values if we are going to survive the well-documented ravages of capitalism. As Quarter (1992, p. xi) has observed, the social economy implies that 'the social value of an organization stands alongside and indeed precedes its economic import'. In the LOFC Network, members foreground their social values by the choices they make – to form a co-op instead of a private business, to join the Network and to work with local farmers.

McMurtry (2010) reminds us that 'the social economy is an idea which requires us to confront the economy not as a choice already made for us, but one which we are making all the time'. Learning is central to making this choice. Learning alterity in the midst of capitalist conformity is happening every day, and the growth of the LOFC Network is but one example.

This paper has provided a window into learning alterity in the social economy. Based on a pilot study of the LOFC Network, it has explored the learning dimensions of this social economy organization, highlighting forms of social learning and linking them to alterity. As one participant offered, 'There isn't a day that I'm not learning something'. Such avid learning can point the way to a more sustainable world. At its best, the social economy is an open possibility that emerges from learning processes that take place through horizontal networks built by critical and constructive adult learners who dream of alternative futures. These futures will only be realized if social-economy organizations like co-operatives cultivate alliances among different forms of social enterprise, thus leveraging their strengths in new ways while overcoming inherent weaknesses (Sumner and Wever, 2015).

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Community learning and learning-by-struggling in solidarity economics

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Abstract

The article covers the concept of solidarity economics developed by autogenous revolutionary struggles – potentias – in the Global South from the 1950s onwards. Theoretical placement and contextualisation of solidarity economics is critically discussed in the second section, followed by methodological and theoretical work on the concept in the third section. Findings and observations from field research in India and Venezuela conducted by the author in 2007 and 2008 are presented in the fourth section, where solidarity economics is seen as an epistemic community with the new language of struggle and also as an attempt at other epistemologies. Perspectives for mutual, participatory, and community learning from the aspect of 'learning-by-struggling' and the educational platform embedded in assemblies, encounters, and different forms of group discussion and decision-making processes are considered in the fourth and fifth sections, together with the idea of the authentic re-creation of community.

Keywords: solidarity economics; militant research; social transformation; community learning; learning-by-struggling

Introduction

In the last two centuries, many penetrating thinkers have raised questions as to how to act in a time of permanent and multiple crises. These include wars, migrations, poverty, historically high unemployment, widespread and even increasing social injustice, and more, all caused by neo-liberalism, ruthless economic growth, human resource theory, etc. We have reached a stage 'where it is easier to think of the total annihilation of humanity than to imagine a change in the organisation of a manifestly unjust and destructive society' (Holloway, 2010, p. 7). Among the many suggested alternative theoretical views, some communities and rebels have already developed 'other' production, 'other' development, and 'other' politics (the Zapatistas' *autogestión*, stateless democracy or democratic confederalism in the liberated Kurdish territories, various attempts at participatory budgeting, micro-governments, etc.). In addition, some have also questioned the western ethno-centric epistemology, which has committed

epistemicide in the name of science (Santos, 2014). Theoretical blindness and epistemological blockage prevent us from seeing the emergence of the alternative economy and the counter-hegemonic movements arising in the Global South, as well as the 'knowledges born in their struggle' (Santos, 2014, p. x) and critical revolutionary pedagogical theory (McLaren, 2000). Therefore, I believe it is more than relevant 'to draw attention to absent knowledges and absent agents' (Santos, 2014, p. 163) and to learn the new language of struggle. The first step towards this kind of solidarity is to educate ourselves about the sociology of emergences (Santos, 2014) arising around the world as a field of enquiry and as an objective social reality, and, 'by learning, to participate in its formation' (Holloway, 2010, p. 12-13). To this end, this paper reconsiders the concept of solidarity economics developed by autogenous revolutionary struggles on the periphery of capitalism, particularly in Latin America after the 1950s, and the informal community and participatory learning that appeared as a result of a learning-by-struggling approach.

The next section deepens and contextualises the current discussion about the social economy versus solidarity economics. The third section introduces theoretical and methodological work on *potentias* – autogenous revolutionary struggles which I developed after a decade of fieldwork, and which were researched within various counter-hegemonic movements, oppressed communities, and solidarity economics. In connection with this concept, I identify where and how solidarity economics has been developed (Foucaults' *heterotopia*) and rethink another (not-yet-scientific) approach to observe, research and describe it, which permitted me to move beyond epistemological blindness, as defined by Santos (2014). The findings from my field research in India and Venezuela between 2007 and 2008 on self-determining revolutionary communities, movements, and co-operatives are presented as epistemic communities with the new language of struggle in the fourth section, with special attention given to the learning and educational processes in *potentias*. I also briefly refer to the well-known Zapatistas' *autogestión* in Mexico, which I researched between May and August of 2005 and other comparable examples which I have studied or researched.[1] In both the fourth and concluding sections, I rethink what could be defined as learning-by-struggling and its perspectives for informal, mutual, participatory, and community learning with the aim of social transformation.

Frame of reference: theoretical placement and contextualisation of solidarity economics

Since the 1980s there has been a rising tide of theoretical works which have tried to re-invent social emancipation (libertarian municipalism (Bookchin, 1982), another production (Santos & Rodríguez Garavito, 2006), the multitude (Hardt & Negri, 2009), the green economy (Alvarez et al., 2006), the no-growth imperative (Zovanyi, 2013), and more) and a multitude of heterogeneous practices such as community-run social-centres, consumer and producer co-operatives, solidarity entrepreneurship, fair trade initiatives, alternative currencies, community-run exchange platforms, do-it-yourself initiatives, community initiatives (resource libraries, credit unions, land trust, gardens), open-source free software initiatives, community supported agriculture programmes, seed libraries, and collective spaces (housing, kitchens, kindergartens, retirement homes). Usually this kind of solidarity and these economic practices are labelled under the name 'économie sociale et solidaire', 'economía social y solidaria', 'social economy', or 'solidarity economy'. All of the above-mentioned heterogeneous practices

might just be a few examples in the compelling array of grass roots economic initiatives which have developed in the last decades as bottom-up movements, co-operatives, or non-governmental organisations. Some see them merely as the remains of the popular economy, failed socialism, co-operativism, different liberation struggles, or the failed welfare state of *The Spirit of 45* and others see them as the labour economy (Coraggio, 2000), distributive economy (Laville, 2010), socialist economy (Singer, 2003), alternative economy (Santos & Rodríguez Garavito, 2006), and more. Although many inspirational examples were not able to bring about a more profound social change or desired paradigm-shift, they are all part of our history of practicing communitarianism, autonomy, horizontality, egalitarianism, mutuality, and solidarity.

Although it is very common for solidarity economics to be integrated within the social economy, they are in fact two different approaches, and the implications of equating them are rather profound. Some authors explicitly expressed the differences (Nardi, 2016; Laville, 2010; Gaiger, 1996; Gaiger, Ferrarini & Veronese, 2015) and some implicitly (Santos & Rodríguez Garavito, 2006; Razeto 1993). Therefore, certain aspects of solidarity economics *versus* the social economy are highlighted in this section to clarify the frame of reference used in the next sections. This question seems to be important since both solidarity economics and social economies have been undergoing a renaissance and a profound transformation in the last few decades and since reconsiderations of the potentialities and the limitations of social transformation are finally coming to the fore in scientific writings after permanent financial, economic, and environmental crises; structural adjustment programmes; and austerity policies in last decades. The differentiation between these two economies might be important because collaborative, emancipatory, and transformative learning, as well as paradigm-shifts, which take place in solidarity economics differ from the learning process in the social economy. Despite many similar learning processes and approaches used by the social economy and solidarity economy, the learning activities of the latter encompass more diverse types of learning as well as much more radical and critical approaches, which I define as the *learning-by-struggling approach* and which I discuss in the fourth and last sections.

As already distinguished by Nardi (2016, p. 3-4), the solidarity economy seeks to 'change the *whole* social/economic system and puts forth a different paradigm of development that upholds solidarity economy principles'. But the primary concern of the social economy is 'not to maximize profits, but to achieve social goals', to be the 'the third leg of capitalism, along with the public and the private sector', or, more radically, 'a stepping stone towards a more fundamental transformation of the economic system' (Nardi, 2016, p. 3-4). In the Brazilian context the concept of the solidarity economy does not encompass all solidarity-driven economic enterprises, but rather those that make solidarity the cornerstone of their internal dynamics and strategies (Gaiger, 1996). For Laville (2010, p. 36-37) the concept of social economy has mostly centred on economic success and has put aside political mediations, while the solidary economy 'has brought to public attention notions of social utility and collective interest, and raised the question of the aim of activities, something that had been sidestepped in the social economy'. Emphasizing its citizen-oriented and entrepreneurial dual dimension, for Laville (2010, p. 36) the solidarity economy goes further than the social economy. Nardi (2016) sees it in an explicitly systemic, transformative, and post-capitalist agenda. This distinction between two overlapping concepts seems to be recognized also by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC, 2012), which knowingly shifted its policy away from solidarity economics in favour of the social economy. Recognizing emerging initiatives which are both political and economic in

nature (Laville, 2010) as a 'force for social change' (EESC, 2012, p. 25), the EESC opted for the hegemonic discourse of the social economy, which is perceived as '… correcting labour market imbalances, deepening and strengthening economic democracy' (EESC, 2012, p. 13). The social economy therefore strives to enrich current economic democracy, while the solidarity economy struggles for *otro mundo*, for another democracy and another economy. Besides these distinctions, some other concerns should be taken into account for an understanding of new solidarity economics.

Solidarity economics is not a model, but a process that arises from multiple traditions, values, and beliefs, and is often inseparably embedded into the history of the emancipatory struggles of the oppressed, lawless, impoverished, etc. by diverse and heterogeneous micro-initiatives undertaken by marginalized sectors especially in the Global South. As noted by Hirschman the transformation of emancipatory energy that begins with social movements in Latin America and later changes into solidarity economic initiatives (and vice versa) is a common trait of the most resilient cooperative experiments (Hirschman, 1984 in Santos & Rodríguez Garavito, 2006, p. xxxiii). The rediscovery of the popular economy (Laville, 2010; Gaiger, Ferrarini & Veronese, 2015) and the renewed interest in cooperatives, particularly in Latin America, are recuperating alternatives to neoliberal capitalism with new 'forms of production based on principles of democracy, solidarity, equity and environmental sustainability – and on a specific realm of transnational activism…' (Santos & Rodríguez Garavito, 2006, p. xix).

I believe that besides all of the above-mentioned strategies and the viability of solidarity economics depending on its ability to create unique socioeconomic environments, some other relevant aspects or principles should be added. For example, various informal learning approaches: *learning through struggle* (Foley, 1999), *learning in struggle* (Vieta, 2014a), awakening 'sleepy knowledge' (Hall, 2009), 'cognitive praxis' as the creative role of consciousness and cognition (Eyerman & Jamison, 1991), informal learning through various participatory practices (Mündel & Schugurensky, 2004), etc. What I observed, and what has not yet been widely discussed, is the emergence of: (1) the 'we-rationality'; (2) permanent rotation of tasks, rolls, obligations and jobs inside solidary economics as well as within the community; (3) formal, non-formal and informal learning, mutuality, and solidarity exercised within and through assemblies, *reunions*, or communes; (4) diverse consensus reaching processes within the same organisation as a decision making body as well as a learning platform; and (5) anticipating women's consciousness, self-determination, and autonomy. All these aspects resonate within the learning-by-struggling approach developed and used in *potentias*, as I try to show in the last two sections.

Although debates concerning the meaning and relevance of solidarity economics have been with us for at least two centuries, from early attempts to create alternative communitarian responses to the capitalist economy, it should be recognised that some thinkers and historic periods dominated over others. Great examples of the rise of alternative production in times of hardship, recession, crisis, and even times of war during the first part of the 20th century, were either very rarely discussed under the concept of solidarity economics, or not discussed at all. Examples such as the self-management of six million people in the Spanish Revolution of 1936–1938, or the self-determining anti-fascist communities in Yugoslavia's liberated territories – with community run schools, hospitals, cultural institutions located among factories, media, and other necessities in the armed struggle – failed to be perceived under the concept of solidarity economics.[2] Instead, the discussion was concerned with the political

dimension (socialism *versus* democracy) and was replaced with the rise of the modern welfare state in Great Britain and France in the 1950s, with the concept re-emerging again in the 1970s under conditions of economic hardship, and after Margaret Thatcher invented 'There is no Alternative'. The same blindness exists today with respect to the Kurds. Amid their autonomous libertarian struggle, they are developing democratic confederalism and a stateless democracy with a solidarity economy, community schools, academies, hospitals, strong grass-roots movements, initiatives, etc. (Biehl, 2012; Burç, 2016; Cattivo, 2014; Dirik, 2016). In this sense and under the hardship of societal fascism (Santos, 2014) that we have experienced in Europe in the last decades, we are – again – not able to see and encompass the important and radical transformations that are already taking place – in the sense of the ecology of knowledges and intercultural translations (Santos, 2014): the libertarian struggle of the Kurds is able to combine the theory of Bookchin's libertarian municipalism, disqualified by western science and activism, with the theories and cognitive praxis of the counterhegemonic struggles in the Global South that are not recognized and therefore not validated by western common sense.

Because solidarity economics often expanded during economic crises and wars, it was often implemented as a strategy to appease people in an uprising (Fals Borda, 1976). Special concern should therefore be placed on the questions of who is running the agenda of solidarity economics and why; what is the main objective of social economics and can it still be considered under the common sense of all-encompassing democracy? Although such discussions are rather difficult to come across in social studies and humanist documents, the past three decades have nevertheless offered some critical reflections on these issues. The example of Bolivia has been discussed by many writers (Galeano, 1971; Zibechi, 2006). While running from the colonial and imperial silver and gold mines to escape oppression and slavery, Bolivia created the highest self-governing city in the world, El Alto, which is also the second largest city in the country, and from the 1950s onwards became a spectacular example of *los microgobiernos barriales* – neighbourhood micro-governments (Mamani, 2005). Similar initiatives supported by marginalized groups and movements have been recognized in many Latin America countries, where the principles of Indian organisations are reactivated to generate original development models (Laville, 2010), or, as in Brasilia, solidarity economic initiatives persisted through indigenous forms of organizing and enhancing community life (Gaiger, Ferrarini & Veronese, 2015, p. 4). There were also many socialist attempts initiated by state authorities in the last two decades. For example, the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela, where the transformation was not conceptualised as an economic or political project, but as 'a pedagogical project that aims to develop "twenty-first century Socialism" through state-grassroots collaboration in the reorganisation of political space in order to develop participatory, democratic institutions and processes' (Duffy, 2015, p. 650). For all these considerations and open questions, the discussion on solidarity economics should be deepened, since these issues were often not avoided, but rather intentionally excluded from the discussion. Such practices and examples should be recalled, recognized, and validated in order to understand the heterogeneity and complexity in which solidarity economics emerged and developed its emancipatory goals and the means to achieve them. To understand the education and leaning-by-struggling in *potentias* that are changing consciousness and enabling people to take an active part in the creation and re-creation of the *otro mundo*, further discussions and analyses of epistemic communities developed within solidary economics are sorely needed.

Potentia, militant research, and heterotopia

Having been born at the end of the 1970s, I had a chance to experience the last decade of socialism in Yugoslavia, where cooperatives called *zadruge* embodied companionship or community, and the term *zadruga* (singular) is actually just an explanation of who such organisations were really intended for (*za-druga*; *for-the-companion,* i.e. an attempt at collective work). At that time I was not aware of socialism's economic and political advantages and disadvantages, however I noticed how public discourse shifted after balkanisation in 1991, and how instead of solidarity economics, cooperatives were often equated with an informal economy, or 'moonlighting'. The negative connotation persists even today as new economic experiments are labelled social entrepreneurships, cooperatives or 'another economy' rather than *zadruga* although the legal form of this kind of entrepreneurships still exist. Soon after the collapse of *for-the-companion* solidarity in Yugoslavia, particularly after the uprising in Chiapas in 1994 and in Argentina in 2001, I started to research solidarity economics and the emerging alternative struggles of rebel communities in Latin America for my PhD and later post-PhD project. I used an ethnographic research method combined with a militant research approach. Similar studies can be traced back to Italian operaismo and autonomia movements of Panzieri, Tronti, and Bologna. I observed self-determining communities, conducted semi-structured interviews with people in social movements and the academic sphere, recorded testimonies, and researched alongside the oppressed in the sense of a worker's co-research and struggler's co-research (Gregorčič, 2011).

    I conducted militant research, an alternative type of qualitative research, as it was introduced after the uprising in Argentina in 2001 by Colectivo Situaciones (2002; 2003; 2005). Militant research practices a 'militant biopolitics' (Hardt, 2011) through community-based action research, a research agenda that resonates with different politics, with *otro mundo,* envisioning the necessity of profoundly different approaches. It attempts to work under the alternative conditions created by the collective itself, and by the ties to counter power in which it is inscribed, pursuing its own efficacy in the production of knowledge useful to the struggles Colectivo Situaciones (2002; 2003; 2005). In fact it moves towards a paradigm 'based on the editing application of prudent knowledges, knowledges that transform research objects into solidary subjects and urge knowledge-based action' (Santos, 2014, p. 163). Militant research tries to generate the capacity for struggles to read themselves and, consequently, to recapture and disseminate the advances and productions of other social practices (Colectivo Situaciones, 2002; 2003; 2005). The researcher-militant is a character made of questions, one who is not saturated by the ideological meanings and models of the world, and one who is authentically anti-pedagogical because he remains faithful to 'not knowing' (Colectivo Situaciones, 2003, p. 8), 'drawing attention to the absent knowledges and absent agents' (Santos, 2014, p. 163). It can be recognized that militant research struggles with expert and dominant knowledge, established research methods, or with the 'monoculture of knowledge' (Santos, 2014) in comparable or parallel ways as the solidarity economy strive for the 'ecology of productiveness' (Santos, 2014). Besides, militant research strengthens epistemological insights at the expense of methodological determination. Since 2003 it has been widely used within counter-hegemonic movements, in alternative art and media, and partly also in academic work (Mato, 2000; Malo, 2004; Shukaitis, Graeber, & Biddle, 2007; Hardt, 2011; Gregorčič, 2011).

During my intense field-research periods, while observing, co-researching, and living with struggling communities, I searched intensely for a proper designation that would authentically identify the various principles and mechanisms of reconstruction or recreation of community, a concept that would explain the new sociality developed by communities, and how revolutionary struggles – by means of reinforcing *otro mundos*, alternative production, democratic democracy, etc. – create processes of self-determination and autonomy. I chose the term *potentia*, which was actually first introduced by Holloway (2002), who claimed that the transformation of power-to (*potentia*) into power-over (*potestas*) implies breaking the social flow of 'doing'. The separation of the 'done' from the 'doing', and from the 'doers', means that people no longer relate to each other as doers, but as owners (or non-owners) of the done. Relations between people in capitalism exist as relations between things, and people no longer exist as doers. Instead, they are the passive bearers of things (Holloway, 2002, 2010).

This thesis appears in other literature as the alienation and fetishism of Marx, the reification of Lukács, the discipline of Foucault, and the identification of Adorno. I defined *potentia* as the subjectivities of those who strengthen what neoliberalism wanted to eliminate at all costs and with every possible means – sociality. *Potentia* cannot be perceived in terms of revolts, the creation of alternative policies, or emancipation practices of rebellious communities, *grupos de base*, affinity groups, or people in uprisings. But rather in terms of autogenous revolutionary struggles responding to the real, immediate needs of the community and producing new principles, processes, and requirements from within, which not only meet basic human needs, i.e. the material conditions for life, but for the most part create the social, cultural, economic, environmental, and political pre-conditions of sociality (Gregorčič, 2011). *Potentias* are re-organizing and re-globalising all that has been brutally localized and fragmented. With intercultural translations and learning-by-struggling, as discussed in the next two sections, *potentias* invented a multitude of new concepts, ideas, theories and practices, values and commitments, methods, and approaches, all resonating among each other.

The anti-capitalist tradition, the promotion of direct democracy, comradeship and solidarity, all of which are inscribed into the *potentia*, is 'the tradition of the commune, council, soviet, or assembly' (Holloway, 2010, p. 40). It is precisely these non-instrumental forms of organisation that focus on the articulation of collective self-determination to which Holloway points, and they are crucial for an understanding of the far-reaching goals of *potentias*. Commune, council, and assembly are the *potentia's* main arena of encounters, meetings, discussions, and the re-creation of sociality, within which the innovative learning platforms are taking place together with political and social engagement. *Potentias* are not utopias, as defined by Foucault (2010, p. 8), designed to offer us consolation or, if unreal, something which happens within a wonderful, flawless locality, but rather heterotopias, shaking the ground underneath our feet. If utopias 'permit fables and discourse: they run with the very grain of language and are part of the fundamental dimension of the fabula' (Foucault, 2010, p. 8), then heterotopias 'desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences' (Foucault, 1984; 2010). For *potentias* to be able to persist in their struggle, they have to create their own sanctuary; their own heterotopia; some sort of dimension or a perfect space characterised by the same precision, order, and permeability that is lacking in the spaces of contemporary societies.

Potentias therefore thrive in peripheral conditions, in localised globalism or new cultural imperialism, as defined by Santos (2014), and it is precisely because of this position, situation, and other territorial and political restraints and connections that they cannot be exempt from neo-liberalism. They have no possibility of escaping or watching the deadly processes of global plundering from the outside. Namely, theory forms part of their life practice (cognitive praxis); it is not their vision or observation of life, because the socialisation corpus – habitus – has been inscribing itself for centuries. It is only in forms such as solidarity economics that the *potentia* appears as a subjectivity that can envision a new world, *otro mundo*, or a dignified society, by doing and/or re-creating it on an everyday basis. It is only in such processes where solidarity economics, embedded in *potentias*, reaches its goal – social transformation. By the same token, the *potentia* without solidarity economics cannot sustain its counter-hegemonic economic performance, and consequently also its autonomy and independence, as explained in the next section. As already highlighted in the prior section, solidarity economics is mostly developed by oppressed and marginalised groups and communities, and often in the so-called 'rest of the world' spaces, where solidarity economics does not simply refer to some kind of non-profit activity, voluntary work, or third sector, hidden under the umbrella of the welfare state or subsidised by a neoliberal economy, but, as discussed in the next two sections, something which was developed within the *potentia*, or 'within the de-globalisation of the local and its eventual counter-hegemonic re-globalisation' (Santos, 2005, p. xxvi). Therefore, solidarity economics must be considered just as much in a political context as in an economic context, since it tends to move towards the transformation of society, and consequently towards the transformation of the economy.

The new language of *potentias*: examples from Asia and Latin America

In this section, I explore *potentias* in two different states and communities which developed solidarity economics on the basis of a political struggle combined with learning-by-struggling. *Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha* (CMM)[3], the Chhattisgarh Liberation Front, emerged in 1982 in India, and Cecosesola[4] (*Organismo de Integracion Cooperativa* or Organism for Cooperative Integration) was founded in late 1967 in Venezuela. CMM evolved from the labour movement initiated by the Chhattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh in 1977 and was led by Shankar Guha Niyogi. Before Niyogi's murder in 1991, CMM became one of the most progressive revolutionary struggles in independent India, and was created as an exceptionally creative, revolutionary, and socially productive synthesis of self-organised miners, industrial workers, and Adivasi (diverse indigenous communities of small farmers and gatherers) into a so-called green-red coalition. Similarly, the Cecosesola was created in an extremely tumultuous political and economic period accompanied by guerrilla movements, a general economic crisis, social want, social unrest, and revolts, all taking place under the imperialist or post-colonialist paradigm already enforcing the neoliberal agenda at that time.

Cecosesola is one of the oldest cooperatives in Latin America that went beyond the economic domain and was able to broaden the scope of production and struggle to community life, livelihood and particularly to the new social and economic relations. It started with a funeral service co-op run by poor inhabitants of Barquisimento, the capital of Lara. People that could not afford to decently burry their relatives simply created a co-operative, just as CMM created Shaheed Hospital only a year after the movement's inception as a response to workers not being allowed to bring pregnant

Adivasi woman to public hospital. Soon after Cecosesola formed a transportation service with 127 buses for people who had no access to public transport, and in four years, starting in the mid-1970s, it became the most economically viable and largest local bus service in Barquisimeto. Like CMM members in India, members of Cecosesola faced severe political repression when the dictatorship saw them as its main political adversary. In 1980 the Venezuelan secret service and police arrested cooperative members and confiscated Cecosesola's offices, installations, and buses, and their co-op accrued a debt totalling nearly $5 million. According to the business code, over the next ten years, Cecosesola would amass a debt equal to 30 times its capital.

Both *potentias* were developed in the conditions of contractual, territorial and societal fascism, as defined by Santos (2007), in the laboratories where the new neoliberal agenda linked to direct foreign investment created special economic zones or parallel-states with governmental lawlessness and administrative deviance, still existing and even expending today. It was in fact within the domain in which these regions were not even politically democratic but at the same time socially fascistic and overall strongly dominated by the hegemonic forces of global capital (ex-imperial and post-colonial *potestas*). Although CMM and Cecosesola used only non-violent means of protests, such as demonstrations (*morchas*) and strikes (*dharnas*), they were savagely put down, especially in the case of CMM, members of which still face terror, imprisonment, slaughter, violence, abuse, murders, and killings under the governmental campaign *Salwa Judum* (operation Green Hunt). Even more significantly, *potentias* experienced suppression from within – in their communities, villages, unions and even households, inside the family – by local, particular and arbitrary repression and fascism, inscribed in their pre-colonial and post-colonial culture, habits, tradition and religion, such as patriarchy, cast, divisions, gender inequality, sexual harassment, pre-arranged (child) marriages, alcoholism, domestic violence, religious splits, fundamentalism and other categorisations. Although the socio-economic preconditions for the development of Cecosesola were less repressive, both *potentias* envisioned the *imaginarium* of autonomous and self-determining communities, a new kind of community-based, participatory, stateless democracy. Both *potentias* underwent a profound and radical transformation within their own communities, villages, and households before they rather spontaneously, unconsciously, and mutually planned and deliberately developed a new paradigm-shift and a new cognitive and political praxis.

Two very important areas in which individuals and communities in *potentias* brought about profound changes, often unnoticed in the literature of social movements and/or alternative economy, are gender emancipation, what I describe as anticipating women's consciousness, women's self-determination, and *zero tolerance* for liquor and other addictions. CMM underwent a very radical anti-liquor campaign at the very beginning of their struggle. It was led by women – mothers, who were struggling to provide for their families. Supported by CMM trade unionists, women brought their drunken husbands in front of the CMM office, where the men had to perform a kind of street theatre on the 'advantages' of liquor consumption. CMM soon prescribed *zero tolerance* for liquor, as later observed by the Zapatistas and many other *potentias*, recognizing this kind of addiction as the first enemy in any liberation process. Observing the anticipation of women's consciousness in *potentias*, I believe that the entire community underwent a profound processes of unlearning of old and relearning of new norms, habits, values, attitudes, practices, beliefs, knowledge, etc., which continues to this day as a never-ending-liberation-process. This process could be analogous to what Illich (2002) called the deschooling of society, by which in the case of *potentias,* individuals and communities have to reject, or completely abandon, many

'normalities', traditions, beliefs, dogma, behaviours, etc. inscribed into their history, culture, and ancestral knowledge. Cecosesola members, for example, referred to 'unlearning of the learned' and to 'new daily learning'. The process of unlearning was often initiated by pitting one stereotype against another and *vice versa*. In the case of CMM and the anti-liquor campaign, it was not the shame or dishonour that forced the men to fully abandon liquor, it was the fact that they had to pay a fine to CMM officials and that the money was returned back to their wives. The men abandoned liquor manly to prevent the women having the power to self-manage the household income, a concept that was considered outrageous in their patriarchal society at that time. Although many new so-called positive discrimination practices were eventually established and internalised, women in *potentias* continue to revolutionize, re-configure and deepen women's consciousness day-by-day. This was done not only accepting *zero tolerance* for violence, abuse etc., but also defining physical and psychological 'untouchability', the right to have their own areas of symbolic and cultural production, a kind of positive discrimination for electing women to positions or roles only by women, while other positions could be voted on, elected, discussed by all genders, etc. Similar and very profound processes can also be observed within the democratic confederalism of the Kurds and in other *potentias*.

Another aspect that is also very relevant for the learning-by-struggling approach in *potentias* is the revival of assemblies, councils, and other community bodies with face-to-face communication, permanent formal and informal deliberative processes. The CMM linked the exploitation of the region to the suppressed cultural identity of Chhattisgarh and revived the *mukhiyas* (elected representatives of worker's councils, Adivasi assemblies, etc.) as the new political body. *Mukhiyas* were systems of self-determination once used by Adivasi communities, which are now in the service of the working class, the community, and all members of the movement. *Mukhiyas* of CMM and the assemblies of the Zapatistas are the main foundation for community action and development in *potentias,* based on *consensus* and a kind of 'criterios colectivos' (collective criteria) as defined by Cecosesola. They are a kind of basic platform for community learning and exchange, or a kind of school for how to democratize their own democracy, a platform where they devise and anticipate their own *otro* community development. Under this platform new rationalities emerge, such as the above-mentioned 'we-rationality', that grow organically within *potentias* from individual to village, cooperative rationality, to collective rationality, with the discourses of 'our community', 'our struggle'. Also there is a renewed terminology of *compañerismo* (companionship), *comunidad* (community), *cooperación* (cooperation), *comunión* (communion), and *coordinación* (coordination), what Razeto (1993) defined as 'factor C', by which he understood solidarity as a sustainable and effective force that drives production in solidarity economics.

New political bodies (assemblies, *reuniones*, *mukhiyas*, etc.) and the 'we-rationality' are interconnected with role and job rotation in *potentias* and a heterogenous inter-personal and intra-personal, informal, community, unintentional, and planned learning, appearing between tireless dialogues at assemblies, roundtables, and meetings. All cooperatives, organisations, and institutions under the Cecosesola umbrella have developed a complex process of consensus decision-making based on experiences and *criterios colectivos*. Participation in meetings to discuss finances and allocate their surplus into projects that benefit the community at large is actually the one and only tool where – if consensus is reached – power is exercised through a collective decision about further community development. Cecosesola's members are all an equal part of the horizontal and heterogeneous network of cooperatives and collectives. They do not have

any special financial or economic knowledge, a secret code on how to run a co-op, but they do have very broad, rich, and detailed knowledge about formal and informal communication, conversation, dialogue, discussion, learning, and rich experiences about the collective decision-making process. In a way, Cecosesola holds *conscientização* meetings or, as Freire said (2000 [1972], 2005 [1983]), invites, convinces, encourages, and makes people understand the importance of their participation. In addition, formal and informal education is very much encouraged in Cecosesola, where members are provided funding to finish or continue their secondary education and/or study in Venezuela or abroad, as well as for study visits and exchanges. More than half of the three hundred members have travelled and gained new experiences and insights in this way.

While Cecosesola envisioned new development paths and a new sociality based on popular education, the liberation theology of Freire and Illich, emerging popular economy experiments, and in particular on their learning-by-struggling approach and cognitive praxis, CMM combined the Gandhian pedagogy of basic education (*Nai Taleem* or *Buniyadi Shiksha*) with the intercultural translation of 'non-existent knowledges' (Santos, 2014). This is the integration of the 'world of work' with the 'world of knowledge' and insights from the struggle of indigenous Bolivian mine workers which Domitilla Barrio de Chungara described in her testimony *Si me permiten hablar* (Viezzer, 1977). They developed a working class technological development paradigm, an innovative alternative to advanced technological development, which has caused foreign investors and the Indian government to opt for a reduction of their short-sighted greed for profit, and accept a long-term, less risky, and more environmentally and socially sustainable alternative. Through a judicious combination and complementary application of old and new technologies, and a vision of the long-term sustainable development for the region, CMM has proven that Chhattisgarh industry, which is less intrusive to the environment, can be significantly more effective and profitable than previously predicted by the coal mine owners, foreign investors, and the Indian government. With its working class technological development and redistribution of wealth which began to return to local communities in the form of higher salaries, CMM also set up a number of alternative educational, health care, social, and cultural institutions, as well as alternative bartering systems and innovative forms of working-class management. All of which contributed to a significant developmental boost for the region, influencing in particular the literacy and quality of life of its inhabitants, who had previously lived as second-class citizens. CMM has established a health programme, community rural healthcare centres, and an education programme (22 schools and secondary schools), improved worker settlements, promoted ecological awareness efforts, created newspapers, and done many other things in service of the community. One of the greatest achievements of CMM's struggle is Shaheed Hospital, entirely funded by miners who simultaneously form the management team of the hospital; each day after they finish their own work in the mines they come to talk to patients and discuss curable illnesses, feelings, and needs. Shaheed Hospital was placed in Dalli Rajhara, which was until then known only as a home for the captive iron ore mines of the Bhilai Steel Plant, the largest integrated steel plant in India and the largest cause of pollution in the region.

Under the motto *sangharsh aur nirman* – economic and political struggles with developmental and cultural renewal activities – and functioning democratically under a collective leadership which had a clear political vision of an alternative social set up and the means to achieve it (Sadgopal & Namra, 1993), throughout the entire process the green-red coalition between the Adivasi and the mine workers also liberated itself from

the caste divisions and religious splits typical of Indian society, something which had not been overcome for centuries. CMM is probably the only example in India where Adivasi, outcasts (Dalits and others), mine and cement workers, doctors, lawyers, and others work together on a daily basis, confronting stereotypes, xenophobia, racism, and other issues through assemblies, meetings, and discussions. The CMM community also liberated itself from sexual discrimination, patriarchy, and other forms of authoritarian mechanisms of oppression because this was an indispensable precondition for the commune, for creating the *potentia*. In the Hemant School over 95% of the students belong to Adivasi and Dalit communities, and more than 60% are girls. By facing discrimination, arrests, displacement, and massacre on a daily basis, CMM has given rise to a new political philosophy of struggle, which is in a dialectical relationship with the reconstruction of a new vision of society. Deeply involved in the struggle for their own causes, they also envision a new world for themselves, and they reconstruct the new world while struggling.

Similarly, the goal of Cecocesosla is social transformation, and the economy is secondary. Cecosesola has undergone numerous production and service stages and now, after almost five decades of struggle and re-creation, it connects over eighty organisations, associations, companies, and groups in the states of Lara, Portuguesa, Trujillo, Barinas, and Yaracuy. Today, Cecosesola as an umbrella cooperative – the 'co-op of co-ops' – is the single largest food-producing cooperative in the country. With over a thousand workers, it supplies around 30% of the population in Lara, and slightly less in other states, selling over 450 tons of farm produce per week, something which has additional importance considering the worsening global food crisis. Over the last decade, Cecosesola has also established a healthcare network of six community centres and a hospital, treating over 160,000 patients every year, costing approximately 60% less than the healthcare services in private clinics. Very much like the CMM hospital, health care workers encourage preventive treatment and are strive for a different attitude towards patients than what is typical of public healthcare services. Another success of Cecosesola has been in establishing highly complex systems of solidarity; it offers financial help to those who have suffered a loss of produce or income, or lost their apartments, jobs, or health due to a natural or other kind of disaster. It has a network of credit unions, welfare services, newly-founded educational and healthcare centres, and advocates an alternative self-governing policy, which was developed outside of and long before the Bolivarian process, and it maintains this policy to this day. Cecosesola alone created a school that helps different co-ops under its umbrella with accounting, management, and investment decisions through workshops and counselling; in effect it was a 'pedagogical project' for solidarity economics before one was imposed by the Bolivarian government.

In both cases – for CMM and Cecosesola – solidarity economics is characterised by negligible material production costs, the use of basic tools, or recycled ones, and technologies already discarded by others. They combine knowledge and practices from the field and use experiences from the new community *habitus*, using its narratives and testimonies as well as their own history of struggles, mistakes, and losses. Both are economically and financially successful: Dalli Rajhara National Bank was awarded for having the highest savings among its inhabitants at the end of 1980 in India; and Cecosesola sells for more than $32 million in products annually. And both are socially progressive, innovative, and somehow charitable (all primary and secondary schools, universities, the healthcare system, the complex system of solidarity, etc. were initiated and are permanently supported by them). However, *potentias* would not be possible without autonomy and self-determination. For this reason sustainable local food and

other material supplies are the crucial elements incorporated in solidarity economics. However, this is not enough to sustain permanent social transformation.

Discussion: learning-by-struggling

Razeto (1993) observed how unemployed workers, expropriated farmers, housewives, and other impoverished and oppressed people without working experience simply *hacer economia* (created an economy), which brought them direct and material benefits. Similarly I tried to understand how *potentias* re-create the social, cultural, economic, environmental, and political pre-conditions of sociality in the condition of contractual, territorial and societal fascism (Santos, 2007), or what is hidden behind the authentic re-creation of a community. Razeto developed 'factor C', while what I tried to somehow develop is the learning-by-struggling approach embedded into *potentias*. For this I analysed learning in two solidarity economics practices, since *potentia* without solidarity economics cannot sustain its counter-hegemonic economic performance, and consequently also its autonomy and independence, as explained in prior section.

Learning-by-struggling exercised at assemblies, meetings, and gatherings in solidarity economics practice (or broader in *potentia*) played a most vital role for re-creating the community. In learning-by-struggling many already defined and encompassed informal learning processes are linked, combined and intertwined. Among them situational and social learning (Pateman, 1988; Wenger 1998; 1999), community learning (Thompson, 2002; Longo, 2007), intergenerational learning (Serrat, Petriwskyj, Villar, & Warburton, 2016), emancipatory learning (Inglis, 1997), transformative learning (Dirkx, 1998; Mezirow, 1991; Illeris, 2014) and mutual and participatory learning (Mündel & Schugurensky, 2004). Learning-by-struggling also contains elements of popular education and new, as yet undefined modes of learning through permanent *encuentros* (encounters or meetings). This is a kind of political educational space of coming together in dialogue, where analyses for communal development, plans for direct actions, fears and desires, despair, and joy are all shared, exchanged, discussed, and considered. These *encuentros* maintain a respect for the heterogeneous proposals and practices derived from the different worlds of historical and political repression and enhance the community and the interdependency between members of the *potentia* and between different *potentias*.

Learning-by-struggling also occurred inside the decision-making arena, in the only tool where – if consensus was reached – power was exercised. The platforms of different assemblies or group discussions that directly or indirectly included all generations in the community, genders, classes, ethnic origins, or religious backgrounds created epistemic communities among *potentia* (and among solidarity economics) members, with the 'we-rationality', informal learning, mutuality, and solidarity exercised within and through assemblies, *reunions*, or communes, anticipating women's consciousness, self-determination, and autonomy, and more. All these aspects already presented in the previous section, resonate within the learning-by-struggling approach developed and used in solidarity economics, that are embedded in *potentias*. The form of their communication was close to storytelling, narration, testimony, using metaphors, surrealism and even myths, although they discussed very concrete and critical topics such as survival, the local economy, boycotts, social actions, and more.

Paradigm shift experiences, mutual learning, participation, and community re-creation strengthened their community identity, enriched culture, and increased resistance, trust, and sociality among *potentia* members. It has increased the quality of

life and finally bonded incompatible the realities of hidden and oppressed subjectivities. It has increased interdependency and enhanced social connectivity among learners. Like the children and teachers in the Zapatista communities, where all are 'participants in the educational process' (Gregorčič, 2009), members of alternative educational systems established by *potentias* are often equated with teachers and learners, encounter 'knowing' with 'not knowing'. Finally, adult members of *potentias* were all equal participants in the revolutionary process and experienced horizontal and egalitarian structures of power relations in all new organisations and institutions; they have created, as well as in solidarity economics, mostly exercised at assemblies or meetings. The same egalitarianism and dialogical relationship perpetuated the new social relations, which could be seen in the principle that everyone in the community has to do everything, and no one does anything alone. This is very similar to the principle by which the Zapatista *potentia* in Chiapas runs his or her educational process: *nadie educa a nadie y nadie se educa solo* – no one educates anyone and no one educates itself alone (Freire, 2000 [1972]). Every role in the community and its position is rotated weekly, monthly or annually – which then re-socialises educational and communication bodies (assemblies, *mukhiyas*, councils). Community members participate in rotating positions that operate under the democratic principle of commanding by obeying, struggling, and reconstructing every aspect of their community life. The diverse forms of group discussion and decision-making processes which took place in the form of assemblies, *mukhiyas*, councils, sometimes small collectives, or big round tables were a fundamental communication tool for *potentias*, decision bodies, and sites of learning-by-struggling at the same time and inside the same process.

What the ecological, financial, and economic crisis on the one hand and *potentias* on the other call for is a different way of producing, living, exchanging, thinking, and researching. 'This has opened up ethical and political possibilities to change pedagogical work in order to discontinue its function in the service of repressive interests of the state and the neoliberal economy and to facilitate its inclusion into emancipatory efforts of counterhegemonic movements' (Zadnikar, 2015, p. 1). To step on this long path, 'profoundly different projects are required, including academic ones, for those of us who desire to bring this other world more fully into being' (Healy, 2014, p. 212). Towards that end and with the recognition that 'the catalytic power of learning and its sister activity knowledge creation have been undervalued and under-theorized in the discourses of social movements' (Hall, 2009, p. 46), I tried to reconsider learning by struggling, the informal community learning in the emerging solidarity economics. It was appropriate to lean on militant research, a qualitative research approach embedded into social transformation. Just as Freire and Gramsci's theory which stressed education for critical consciousness, some contemporary critical educational theorists and researchers (McLaren, 2000; Hall, 2009; Mündel & Schugurensky, 2004; Hardt, 2011; Vieta, 2014a; Duffy, 2015; etc.) are revisiting the links between learning and social change. What I attempted to show in this article in this regard was the need for theoretical work that goes hand in hand with the transformative work (Santos, 2014), methodological innovativeness that strengthens epistemological insights, and the need for attempts to articulate not-yet-defined processes that are appearing in *potentias*. In this respect I emphasized the learning-by-struggling as a vital process for the re-creation of solidarity economics, self-management and *autogestión* in a broader, political sense and self-determination. Learning-by-struggling is mutual articulation of collective self-determination and cooperation which is taking place through communication and decision-making platforms such as the assembly, *mukhiya*, councils, or the political and educational space of coming together in dialogue – *encuentros* – through diverse and

heterogeneous platforms. These meetings of *conscientização* invite, convince, encourage, and make people understand the importance of their participation are re-creating the community of the oppressed into *potentias*.

Endnotes

[1] Militant research in India was done between August and November of 2007, and in Venezuela between April and June of 2008 for my post-doctoral research project: Social Dimensions of Sustainability through the Processes of Dematerialisation and Resocialisation (Slovenian Research Agency, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences). Research in Mexico was done between May and August of 2005 on my own.

[2] As argued in the next section solidarity economics alludes to self-management as well as to self-determination. This argument supports a profound study of Vieta (2014b) that proved how *autogestión* and the stream of self-determination are relevant for the new emerging cooperativism in 21th century. For Mendizábal and Errasti (2008) *autogestión* has its theoretical roots in the forms of cooperative and collective production practiced in parts of revolutionary Spain in 1936. They define it through 'cooperative production' and 'social and participative democracy' (Mendizábal & Errasti, 2008, p. 1). *Autogestión* for contemporary Latin American theorists most immediately invokes the democratisation of the economic realm at the micro-level of the productive enterprise, such as worker's coops and collectives, worker-recuperated enterprises, rural producer cooperatives, family-based microenterprises, as well as neighbourhood collectives (Cattani, 2004).

[3] In order to research the Chhattisgarh Liberation Front in India, I observed, co-researched, and worked with more than 30 miners, trade unionists, Adivasi families, doctors, nurses, etc. for two months. Long semi-structured interviews were done with lawyers Sudha Bharadwaj and Vrinda Grover, doctor Saibal Jana in Shaheed hospital, the leader of CMM in Bhilai Kaladas Dahariya, and many others. In addition to them I also interviewed important theoreticians and critical thinkers: educator Anil Sadgopal, PhD, professor of politics Hargopal, PhD, head of the human rights forum Balagopal, PhD, journalist Subhash Gatade, documentary movie director Amar Kanwar, Telugu revolutionary poet Vaaravara Rao, and many other supporters of the movement such as Rachna Dhingra, Ravi Sinha, Sri Nivas Rao, Ramkunwar Rawat, Madhuri Krishnanswamy, and more.

[4] To research Cecosesola I discussed, observed, co-researched, and worked with dozens of farmers, various co-op members, nurses, and more for one week in May of 2008, and conducted semi-structured interviews with former co-op president Gustavo Salas Romer. In addition to him I also interviewed: Adriana Ribas, a member of the Ezequiel Zamora National Campesino Front, Douglas Bravo, a former guerrilla fighter and critic of Bolivarian process, Gonzalo Gómez, editor of alternative web magazine, Roland Denis, a member of Militant Assemblies building the territories of People's Government, and many others.

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'I cannot be passive as I was before': learning from grassroots innovations in Ukraine

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"Problems cannot be solved with the same mindset that created them".

  Albert Einstein

Abstract

The study explores learning processes and outcomes inside grassroots innovations that are emerging in post-Euromaidan times in Ukraine. The study analyses the assumption that this non-traditional education space can be adequate for sustainability transition learning and critical consciousness development. First, the study describes, connects, and operationalizes the concepts of critical consciousness, sustainability transition, and grassroots innovations. Then, it analyses two cases of grassroots innovations (two online sharing platforms), using these operationalized concepts. The results show that learning and critical consciousness development inside grassroots niches are much more connected to previous experience, such as participation in the protest event Euromaidan, than to inner niche learning interactions. While, the online platforms keep alive some of the aspirations that motivated people to become a part of the Euromaidan protest. In this sense, such grassroots innovations keep the values and priorities of the participants "alive" and ensure that the critical consciousness that was acquired does not simply slide backwards. Do shocking events like Euromaidan protest have to happen in order to accelerate learning about values of solidarity and responsibility, as well as to develop critical consciousness needed for sustainability transition? Despite the impossibility to completely answer this question, this study gave some tips, suggesting components of critical conscious development needed for this type of learning—dialog, reflection, action, leading to increase in efficacy and agency.

Introduction

Authors that write about sustainability transition, defined as the process of shifting modern society to a more sustainable development path, increasingly talk about an urgent need for changes in the current global development system. Many of them have demonstrated the limits of economic growth and its connection to environmental and social devastations (Daly, 1973; Jackson, 2011; Martínez-Alier, Pascual, Vivien, & Zaccai, 2010; Schneider, Kallis, & Martinez-Alier, 2010). As an alternative, they emphasise the importance of social and environmental dimensions of development (*ibid*).

Mainstream thinking, however, embedded within the current economic growth system, make it almost impossible to imagine an economy that does not promote growth in terms of GDP, as much as a world without oil, mining, wars, plastic or inequality. Within this thinking, we can find people of different ages, from different regions of the world and with different political views (Parker, Cheney, Fournier, & Land, 2014).Thus, some scholars suggest that changes should start from the system of education, which would necessitate a shift in consciousness regarding sustainability issues (Ball, 2010; Lambert & David, 2008; Simonneaux & Simonneaux, 2012). This is particularly relevant for adult education that historically emerged from the struggle of common people on the pathway towards the consciousness change (Freire, 1973). According to Paulo Freire, the main idea behind education lay in the construction of a critical consciousness, meaning:

> [...] depth in the interpretation of problems; by the substitution of causal principles for magical explanations; by the testing of one's own findings and openness to revision...; by refusing to transfer responsibility; by rejecting passive positions; by soundness of argumentation; by the practice of dialogue rather than polemics...; by accepting what is valid in both old and new. (1973, p. 18).

However, currently 'adult education in Europe seems to have progressively forgotten its history made of fighting, resistances, creativities and it is transforming into an instrument of power only used for personal development and in the logic of the market' (Lucio-Villegas, 2016, p. 2). This approach to education examines a person as a human capital or a human resource needed for the well-functioning growing economic system and thus is far from adult education as both a social and political project (Becker, 2009). Searching for alternatives to unlimited economic growth (as called for in some of the sustainability transition studies e.g. Jackson, 2011; Schneider, Kallis, & Martinez-Alier, 2010), implies learning that demands more than development as defined by the logic of the market, proposed by some adult education practices (Gelpi, 1984). As such, I turn my attention to the educators like Paulo Freire. A key question would be—where to find examples of this type of learning in the time of obsession with economic growth. Among several ideas, grassroots innovations in social economy are growing in popularity (Castells, 2013; Seyfang & Smith, 2007; Shepard, 2013; Sonnino & Griggs-Trevarthen, 2013). They are not driven by profit and thus can be seen as an important alternative to the modern economic growth system.

In this study, I take one more step towards a non-traditional dimension of learning studies and explore these innovations in post-Euromaidan Ukraine. By Euromaidan I mean a collective name for demonstrations and civil unrest in Ukraine, which began on the night of the 21st of November, 2013 with public protests in Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) in Kiev. It started as a demand for closer European integration but turn into a protest against widespread government corruption, abuse of power and

violation of human rights in Ukraine. Despite numerous negative consequences, connotations and views about this event, it became a powerful symbol of people's desire to be agents of their own destiny (Bohdanova, 2014; Gatskova & Gatskov, 2015; Ogryzko & Pishchikova, 2014; Puglisi, 2015; Pytlik, 2015), in analogy to the Sidi Bouzid revolt in Tunisia, Tharir square in Egypt, Syntagma in Greece, Puerta del Sol in Spain, Zuccotti park in the USA and Gezi park in Turkey.

Currently, post-Euromaidan Ukraine is undergoing a series of social, political, and economic transformations and thus would not be typically considered a case for either sustainability or education research. On the contrary, this study's starting assumption is that different types of diverse and intense learning, including those relevant for sustainability, can be discovered in such conditions. Consequently, the aim of this study is to identify and explore these learning processes and outcomes. By bringing together case studies from Ukraine and grassroots innovation theories as well as the Freirian prospective on learning, this study analyses different types of learning outcomes, processes and their connection to critical conscious development as well as sustainability learning.

Theoretical framework

Sustainability transition and grassroots innovations

In this article, I use sustainability transition to describe the process of shifting modern society to a more sustainable development path. At the core of modern discussions on this transition is the question of economic growth (Daly, 1973; Jackson, 2011; Schneider et al., 2010). By recalling the destructive power of unlimited growth, described in the Club of Rome's charismatic publication *Limits to Growth* (Meadows, Meadows, Randers, & Behrens, 1972), Tim Jackson's comprehensive book *Prosperity without Growth* (Jackson, 2011), a provocative *Farewell to Growth* of Serge Latouche (Latouche, 2009) and thought-provoking *Aftermath: The Cultures of the Economic Crisis* (Castells, Caraça, & Cardoso, 2012) and recent ideas of *Laudato Si* by Pope Francis (Francis, 2015), these discussions call for the economic transformations at the core, by criticising high rates of growth that may simply not be possible or desirable anymore.

Many of these suggestions, such as degrowth (Latouche, 2009), steady state economy (Daly, 1973), beyond growth (Jackson, 2011), *bien vivir* (Gudynas, 2011) or *ubunty* (Murithi, 2006), share core similarities, calling for focus on social and environmental well-being instead of economic growth, and thus, revitalizing old ideas of Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen (1993), who stated that the purpose of the economic processes should be the enjoyment of life and not simply GDP growth.The question, however, is how can we change the focus from economic growth to social and environmental well-being—when we are parts of current economic growth system?

Among many suggestions of such a transition, innovations are growing in popularity (Grin, Rotmans, & Schot, 2010). Innovations are argued to be important when a dominant (unsustainable) system cannot solve the underlying problems (Sanne, 2002). A number of studies on so called Strategic Niche Management (SNM)[1] have looked at the aspect of innovations for sustainability and revealed that accumulations of innovations in the protected niches might trigger widespread systems-change (Geels & Schot, 2007). The majority of the traditional SNM publications have been focused on the cases of efficiency improvements and technical innovations (Geels & Raven, 2006). Sustainability transition authors, on contrary, often criticized ideas of so called technical

optimism. They emphasize that 100% recycling is impossible (Huesemann, 2003), renewable energy would still require resource extraction (Wanner, 2015) and increases in efficiency do not always lead to decreases in consumption rates. A simple example is cars for which the improvement in resource use (km per litters) does not lead to lower energy use, but rather increase in kilometres - so called Jevons' Paradox (Alcott, 2005). Thus, improvements in the production processes (e.g. efficiency or recycling) and artefacts (e.g. products, services and infrastructure), without understanding of need to reduce consumption rates can lead to increases in recourses consumption (Alcott, 2005). This means that if we want to effectively tackle sustainability problems, we need to aim at a change in understanding—in consciousness, not simply at a new technology development or efficiency improvement. This change is argued to be achieved in combination with values and behaviour changes by 'replacing the relationship of competition, fierce dispute, war of all against all—which, in current society, makes the individual a *Homini Lupus* (a wolf to other human beings)—with a relationship of cooperation, sharing, mutual help, solidarity' (Lowy & Betto, 2003, p. 334).

Regarding post-Soviet countries, this would also mean taking a more active position and recognizing one's responsibility, in order to replace a mentality of *Homo Sovieticus*—a sarcastic term used to describe a socio-cultural type of the average person in the Soviet Union that is characterized by a lack of initiative and avoidance of taking any individual responsibility (Gatskova & Gatskov, 2015; Levada & Golov, 1993; Shiller, Boycko, Korobov, Winter, & Schelling, 1992). That is why Seyfang and Smith (2007) turned the focus of SNM towards civil society and innovations in social institutions and arrangements instead of the traditional technical innovations approach and started to use grassroots innovations niches as a main subject of studies. They defined grassroots innovations as: 'innovative networks of activists and organisations that lead bottom-up solutions for sustainable development; solutions that respond to the local situation and the interests and values of the communities involved' (Seyfang & Smith, 2007, p. 585).

Different lessons can be derived from the grassroots innovations niches (e.g. Hoogma, 2002). They can be basic, such as social or technical requirements for development of solar water heating system. Such 'first-order' learning can be supplemented by 'second-order' learning that generates lessons about the alternative socio-cultural values underpinning the niche (Hoogma, 2002). In contrast to first order learning, second-order learning takes a step back and questions the values and assumptions that frame the configuration of the system, and draws deeper reflections about it (Smith, 2007). For example, work-sharing grassroots innovations may initiate a discussion about different work and labour valuation (Knight, Rosa, & Schor, 2013), community currencies might provide alternatives to the financial system tools (Dittmer, 2013). In this sense, such niches create learning spaces that nurture critical thinking and innovative actions.These types of collective learning may lead to transformations in the systems that would not be achieved by individuals alone (Young & Middlemiss, 2012). This is an essential difference from individual-consumer learning and following behaviour change (e.g. buying organic from the supermarkets), so often promoted by mainstream sustainability. As argued by Seyfang (2005) 'citizenship of the market' through sustainable consumption does not challenge the dominant power structures of the economic and political system; while collective change can possibly make a difference. Consequently, if second order collective learning is involved, and a broad network of users and outsiders are embedded, then the niche may contribute to the formation of a new system (Smith, 2007). In this sense, grassroots innovations can have

ambitions beyond the micro-level. This is an important point since a small assembly can trigger wider processes towards social change.

Previous academic research has examined some grassroots innovations that tackle social exclusion and unemployment (Williams et al., 2001); localise economies and improve resilience (Castells et al., 2012); build social capital and civic engagement (Kingsley & Townsend, 2006); promote sustainable consumption and production (Pearson, Pearson, & Pearson, 2010); as forms of alternative social movements, civil resistance and civil disobedience (Shepard, 2013) and innovative niches (Seyfang & Smith, 2007; Smith, Voß, & Grin, 2010). However, there have been very few examinations of grassroots innovations as learning for sustainability niches and spaces for critical consciousness development. This is where the contribution of this article lies: to examine grassroots innovations learning potential.

Theorizing learning

There are many theories about what enables us to know or to develop knowledge (e.g. Bandura, 1977; Latour, 2005; Piaget, 1976; Vygotsky, 1978). There are also a wide range of ideas coming from many different disciplines, about what constitutes learning. In general, learning theories are a complex and rich terrain of ideas that can be organised in different ways and each grouping would tell a different story (see e.g. Blackmore, 2007). Of the many theories of how learning happens or can happen, some are more relevant to the contexts of learning about sustainability transition than others. As discussed earlier, learning for sustainability transition would require a shift in consciousness regarding sustainability issues and creation of alternatives to unlimited economic growth. Vision of alternatives to any problematic system, whether economic or political one, starts from the understanding of the existing hegemony (Gramsci, 1995) or oppression, problems in the system—that is the core of critical consciousness (Freire, 1973). Learning for critical consciousness, thus is the most relevant approach to be used in the context of this study.

In his book, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, Freire (1973) defines three stages in attaining critical consciousness, 'semi-intransitive consciousness', 'naïve transitivity' and 'critical transitivity' (see figure 1, p. 232). In a semi-intransitive stage, the individual is not focused on any other matters other than those involved with the basic elements of survival and are not capable of effectively comprehend other challenges. The majority of poor, dispossessed or uneducated individuals may remain in this stage due to their focus on meeting basic needs. Freire (1973) observes that when oppressed groups begin to respond to inquiry about their existence, increase their ability to discuss their world amongst themselves and with those outside their social group, they become transitive and no longer just react to a limited sphere of subjects but instead begin to react to a more general sphere of specific problems. The second stage of critical consciousness is, thus, naïve transitivity, which Freire' characterizes as including behaviours such as over-simplification of problems, under-estimation, a tendency to gregariousness, a disinterest in investigation, fascination with magical explanations of reality and practice of polemics. At the same time, it is a step forward from the limited focus on one's own basic needs satisfaction. In the final stage, critical transitivity, individuals begin to test their own understanding of problems, attempt to avoid distortion of problem perception, avoid preconceived notions and reject passivity by practicing dialogue and action. These individuals are receptive to new ideas without rejecting old ideas, they act and thus, promote social change. This is something Freire calls 'Critical Consciousness'. At the same time, Freire also states that individuals can

develop a fanaticized consciousness instead of critical consciousness (see figure 1, p. 6). These individuals would 'act more on the basis of emotionality than reason; … and tragically leads to irrationality, defeat, objectification, passivity, fear of freedom, and the loss of reflective action among the people' (p. 19-20).

In analysis of current social movements, English & Mayo (2012) also warn about possibilities of emergence of radical groups and practices that can be seen as examples of fanaticized consciousness development. They assume that this is a result of limited learning at the stage of naive transitivity (Ibid). According to the authors, learning might not occur when there is a lack of intentionality and effort to analyse and criticize the activity. Moreover, as mentioned by Freire (1973), learning is a dynamic process, rather than a static phenomenon. Critical consciousness can be obtained but also can be lost. This is why the arrows are two-way in the figure 1. Also, this is why it is important to understand the processes behind critical consciousness development and possibly retention.

| *Semi-intransitive* | ⟷ | *Naïve* | ⟷ | *Critical or Fanaticized* |

Figure 1. Stages of dritical consciousness development according to Freire (1973).

The concept of 'critical consciousness' is a useful theoretical base for this study. At the same time, however, the ideas of critical consciousness beg the question of the operationalization—how the process of learning and critical consciousness transformation is actually happening and what are the components of critical consciousness development. According to Freire's model, 'praxis' (meaning action and reflection) and 'dialog' are equally important components of learning process leading to the development of critical consciousness.

Dialog approach to learning views learners as subjects in their own learning. The importance of this approach stems from the idea that knowledge is socially constructed and not something that exists outside of language and the social subjects who use it. Learning, obtaining knowledge and making meaning is thus a social process rather than the work of the isolated minds; it thus cannot be divorced from learners' social context that are experienced through dialog. Paraphrasing Vygotsky (1978), this learning process originates in, and must therefore be explained, as products of social interaction. At the same time, according to Freire, it is not enough for people to come together in dialogue in order to gain knowledge of their social reality and develop critical consciousness. They must *act* together upon their environment and after critical *reflection* upon their reality and so transform it through further action and critical reflection—so called 'praxis'. Thus, in addition to dialog or social learning or interpsychological learning, as called by Vygotsky (1978), there should be intrapsychological learning, on the individual level through reflection. Consequently, *action, reflection* and *dialog* constitute main processes of learning needed for critical consciousness development, according to Freire (1973).

What is less clear is if these are sufficient to develop critical consciousness? Watts, Diemer, & Voight (2011) for examples, questioned whether critical reflection is sufficient for action. Considering an example from Freire's (1973) book, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 'to every understanding, sooner or later an action corresponds' (p. 44). According to the author, once we would perceive a challenge, understand it, and

recognize the possibilities of response, we would act. The phrase 'recognizes the possibility of response' suggests that psychological factors influence civic and political behavior (Watts et al., 2011), meaning particular leave of agency and political efficacy is needed to start acting. Together, the ideas above could suggest components of critical consciousness to be—*dialog, reflection, political efficacy* (the perceived ability to affect sociopolitical change), *agency, action* (see figure 2, p. 233). These components are connected and together interplay in iterative ways. Thus, for example an action can be followed by reflection and vice versa.
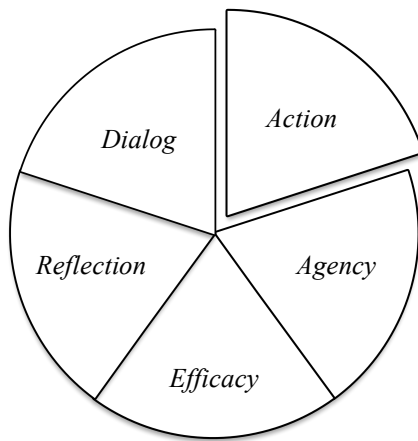

Figure 2. Components of critical consciousness development

All together these components can create unlimited circles of learning (or simply, experience). Learners would bring prior knowledge (different collections of circles) into a learning situation, which in turn forms the basis for construction of new knowledge. Upon encountering something new, learners would first reconcile it in some way with their previous ideas and experiences. This may mean changing what they believe, expanding their understanding, or disregarding the new information as irrelevant. Their learning therefore has subjective and affective (emotional) elements that come from interpreting data from their environment in the light of their own experience (Wadsworth, 1996). Schematization of the complexities behind critical consciousness development and also identification of vital components of critical consciousness allows to operationalize the concept of critical consciousness. This enables a more detailed and structured analysis of the critical consciousness development observed in analysed empirical cases, and can further lead to more in-depth theoretical discussions.

Methodological framework

Cases selection

The list of grassroots innovations from Ukraine was created through online search between August 2015 and December 2015. The search was based on main criteria of grassroots innovations such as described by (Seyfang & Smith, 2007, p. 592):

- Based in the social economy (rather than the market economy);
- Focus on social and institutional innovation (rather than technological);
- Driven by social need and ideological commitment (rather than profit-seeking);
- The 'protected space' which supports their development is often one of alternative values and culture (rather than market regulation and subsidies);

- Constituted by diverse organisational forms such as cooperatives, voluntary associations, and informal community groups (rather than firms);
- Rely on grant funding, volunteer labour, mutual exchange and only limited commercial activity (rather than principally commercial income)

The collection of information about non-registered grassroots is difficult, since there is no single official or unofficial database that lists these initiatives. Thus, social media webpages as well as social forums, relevant events and meetings, combined together with snowball sampling by recommendations from contacted social initiatives were used in order to create a list of initiatives. This approach is an effective means to increase sample size while providing a robust snapshot of the object of study (c.f. Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Neuendorf, 2002). This approach allowed of the identification of one hundred different grassroots innovations in Ukraine from different regions.

The next part of the research consisted of selecting two cases to represent grassroots innovations in the area of social economy. Such innovations are not driven by profit and thus can be seen as an important alternative to modern economic growth system, something that sustainability transition scholars are calling for. After careful selection process, Plushkin and Murahy online platforms were chosen to represent these alternative economy innovations, since they are based on mutual exchange and sharing. The case study approach allowed focusing the empirical study even more by concentrating on particular details of case in relations to niche- and learning theories. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were used as a method to allow for an in-depth analysis. Twenty-five interviews were conducted during December 2015 to July 2016. Respondents were organizers and participants of the analysed grassroots innovations. The selection of respondents was based on the idea of presenting both organizers' and participants' points of views[2]. Organizers were contacted directly; while participants were selected from Murahy and Plushkin online web portals. Interviews enabled the discovery of information which would not be possible to obtain through written materials about grassroots innovations (such as interviewees' personal learning outcomes). This type of information is necessary to understand the complex picture of the learning inside grassroots innovations in Ukraine.

Questions were centred on learning outcomes (what has been learned) and processes (how it has been learned). The learning process was further analysed using Freire's (1973) stages (semi-intransitive, naïve, critical or fanaticized) and elements (dialog, reflection, action, efficacy and agency) of critical consciousness development (see figure 3, p. 234).
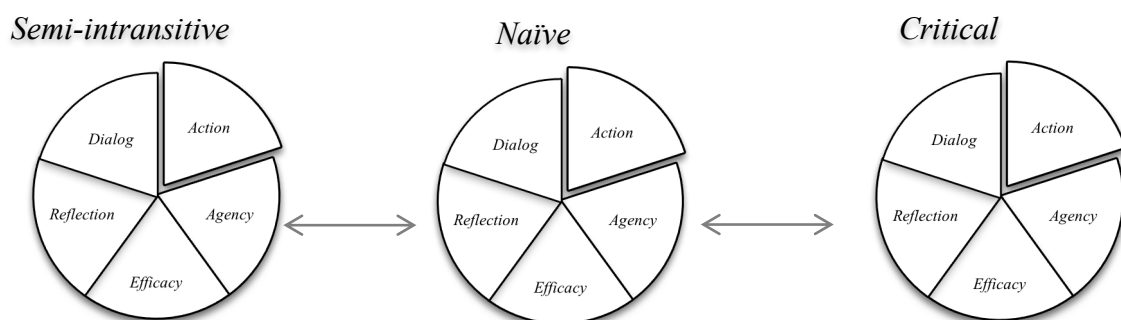

Figure 3. Stages and components of critical consciousness development.

Case descriptions

Plushkin

Plushkin is an online platform that allows users to exchange products among each other[3]. Members can post an offer an item that they no longer require; while other members can suggest an exchange. Members can contact each other directly on this platform and arrange the exchange, either by post or in person. A diverse range of items are exchanged, including cloth, books, furniture, mobiles, computers and cars—just to give some examples. Now the platform offers the possibility to exchange not only stuff but also services. For example, singing lessons can be exchanged for a dress or English lessons. The rules of transactions are decided and controlled by the participants. Plushkin was created in 2014, by two activists concerned with global environmental degradation, economic crisis in Ukraine and desire to help the local community. It started as a small online group on Facebook. Today, the platform has more than one hundred thousand users actively engaged in the transactions in different regions of Ukraine[11].

Murahy

The online platform Murahy [translation—ants] is another grassroots innovation project[4] that allows selling no longer needed items, while automatically redirecting the income to social initiatives. This platform is not restricted to any territory and allows people with different incomes to contribute to the common good. For example, people from rural areas without high income can place an ad selling few kilos of apples (that would be spoiled otherwise), while those with the opportunity to travel can pick up those apples. This transaction would be made without physical exchange of money between seller and buyer; funds are paid by the buyer online and are automatically directed to social initiatives. The initiative group of Murahy was created in 2015, out of Euromaidan activists that were involved in resource generation during the protest event and felt the responsibility to continue the idea of mutual help among people. Thus, the online flea market idea was initiated with a vision to create a mutual help platform that would completely rely on the civil responsibility of community members and would solve environmental concerns at the same time. The platform received a lot of attention from the public and from the initial few participants; about 4000 people have joined the online platform today[5].

Results

Learning outcomes

Wide varieties of different learning outcomes were reported by grassroots innovations participants (see table 1, p.237). Participants from the same initiative often stated different learning outcomes. For example, some participants of Plushkin talked about community building and solidarity; while others focused on sustainable production and consumption; some on economic survival, and others on alternatives to the current economic system.

Despite such a diversity of learning outcomes, it is possible to describe them as either first- or second-order learnings; using the classification of Hoogma (2002). Learning about ability to "recycle" by selling (Murahy) or exchanging (Plushkin) unneeded belongings in order to generate resources to help others (Murahy) or our own family (Plushkin) was a first-order learning outcome, shared among participants (see

table 1, p. 237). The reflection on actions of either selling or exchanging stuff online, further lead to great diversity of social, environmental, and economic second-order learning outcomes reported by respondents. Regarding social learning, respondents spoke mainly about solidarity, though the lens of a community crowd funding (Murahy) or community self-help (Plushkin).

Many stressed the importance of a strong community for solving its inner problems without asking for external and often top-down help; stressing the lack of trust in governmental structures, and referring to the political crisis in the country. In a way, they connect solidarity with political autonomy. 'people solve their own problems, without going to the state or some foundations', as was mentioned by one of the respondents. An important observation was that most respondents of both organizations connected these learning outcomes with previous experience—mainly participation in Euromaidan. As was mentioned by the respondent from Plushkin:

> […] after Euromaidan, I have realized that sharing is normal practice […] not only for beggars. Thus, it was ok for me to join [Plushkin]. I further learned here [Plushkin] that sharing can be important part of everyday life.

The respondent from Murahy commented on it from a responsibility perspective:

> '[…] there [Euromaidan] I felt that I am a part of this bigger community that need my help […] and if I don't help who will […] and who will later help me?'

Respondents from Plushkin were more concerned with the economic survival part of exchange, while respondents from Murahy were in general more concerned with the social help and solidarity parts of exchange. At the same time, environmental learning outcomes were mentioned by respondents from both initiatives. All respondents in some way or another questioned the ideas behind the current throw-away culture:

> […] a great alternative to simply throwing away things and, thus, polluting', was commented by the participants that joined Murahy because of the social considerations or 'why do we just keep throwing things and after polluting our environment […] why it is so important for us to get new things without caring for an environment.

This was mentioned by the respondent from Plushkin who joined the grassroots initiative mainly because of economic considerations. Several respondents made steps forward in this reflection and connected throw-away culture with the limitations of the current economic system. Participants from Plushkin were mostly talking about alternatives to the current economic system, as for example, stated by one of the respondents: '[…] as an alternative to constantly buying things from supermarkets and supporting the riches'. Respondents from Murahy focused more on the importance of non-materialistic values that are 'falling out of the current economic system'.

Despite being critical of the current economic system, none of the participants directly questioned economic growth *per se* or talked about economic autonomy or alternatives to neo-liberal regimes, as described by sustainability transition authors. On the contrary, the majority of Plushkin participants reflected on the action of sharing as an act of economic surviving in the first place, stressing the harsh conditions of current economic crisis.

	Murahy	Plushkin
First order learning	Learning about ability to "recycle" by selling unneeded belongings in order to generate resources to help others	Learning about ability to "recycle" by exchanging unneeded belongings in order to generate resources for own family's quality of life improvement
Second-order learning — Social	Solidarity (community funding); Responsibility	Solidarity (community self-help); Sharing
Second-order learning — Environmental	Limited Questioning the throw-away culture and pollution	Limited Questioning the throw-away culture and pollution
Second-order learning — Economic	Importance of non-materialistic values	Alternatives to current economy practices Mainly—economic survival

Table 1. Learning inside analysed grassroots innovations.

Learning processes

During the interviews, the majority of the respondent connected current learning outcomes with previous learning experiences. Some respondents mentioned learning about problems in e.g. the environmental or economic system and need of social economy by watching movies, reading or listening to lectures— mainly Plushkin respondents. At the same time, all respondents were more focused on describing wide variety of learning outcomes connected to participation in Euromaidan protest, even if asked about learning inside a grassroots innovation niche. They described learning crowd funding, management, communication and organizational skills during the protest (first-order learning) needed for future initiative creation/engagement. They often referred to the protest as a "school" of activism or a contact making place.

At the same time, learning about *personal responsibilities* during the protest was the most often mentioned learning outcome (22 out of 25 respondents) leading to further initiative creation/engagement (second-order learning). Many of the respondents took part in the everyday life support system of the Euromaidan protest city. They were acting and interacting with other protesters while performing basic functions e.g. cooking food, brining clothes?, cleaning or simply being at the Maidan square. The second most mentioned learning outcome (19 out of 25 respondents) was *solidarity learning* (using words as mutual help, cooperation and sharing), 'by working together we understood what togetherness means', as was commented by one of the respondents. Many respondents mentioned learning about solidarity as basic to a well-functioning society. For them, Euromaidan protest city became an example of such a society.

This worked as some kind of anthill; everyone knew what to do without anyone telling how to do it. This small independent republic with thousands of permanent residents [protesters] and its own leadership structure, budget, border guards, self-defence units, open university, mail and health services, entertainment programs, housing (hundreds of tents), and systems for distributing and even producing food. This was mentioned by the respondent from Murahy who added 'I have seen what cooperation really means'. According to the respondents, the learning process continued also in the post-Euromaidan times. Most of them reflected on participation in the protest time. Some respondents mentioned reflecting about their own mistakes or the problems of the protest itself, such as 'I don't think protests are great things, it is not constructive way of solving the problems'. At the same time, despite these critiques all respondents

mentioned the importance of their participation in the protest and its effect on their perception of everyday reality.After post-Euromaidan reflection, respondents started to recognize increased political efficacy and agency:

> I saw that a corrupted old government was leaving and I thought if this is possible—than everything else is possible. Thus, everyone can make a difference including me […] so I continued by joining the initiative [Murahy].

One of the key aspects of learning and reflecting in this stage was the ability to transfer knowledge gained in protest to the real post-protest time activates. 'There was no competition and there was no need for competition [referring to Euromaidan], I continued in the same way by creating Murahy'. Another respondent added:

> I don't think protests are great things, it is not constructive way of solving the issues […] but we had no other ways […] now we have to develop more constructive ways, like joining these initiatives [referring to Plushkin].

Thus, the act of creation or joining initiatives was clearly connected to previous experience (mainly participation in Euromaidan) for the majority of the interviewees. One of the respondents commented:

> I cannot be passive as I was before Euromaidan. Coming back to ordinary life and forgetting everything is not an option in my family. We are searching ways how can we contribute to the change initiated […] how can we make better society that is based on mutual help and support, democracy and transparency […] and we search the ways we can learn about it more.

Similar to this respondent, many participants mentioned eagerness to learn and explained this as a reason to join other grassroots initiatives in addition to Plushkin or Murahy. Inside online initiatives as Plushkin and Murahy, most of the participants mentioned learning by doing as a main mechanism—as respondent from Murahy commented 'I learned this new tool for recycling just by trying it does not matter that I was interested only in social help ideas'. Dialog among participants is of course limited to conversations about details of exchange transaction. Instead, many mentioned learning though reflection on their actions. As one respondent form Plushkin stated 'I started just because of economic interest and learned that there are new tools for recycling'. Thus, by acting and reflecting on an action, respondents of the online platform were able to continue the learning process.

Analysis

Learning processes

The study identified that learning is a complex process that develops in the different stages of participants' life. While, for example, learning for environmental and economic sustainability aspects happened inside grassroots innovations niches, an important part of niche related learning also has happened prior to engagement/creation of the initiatives. The respondents often connected learning with previous events—mainly with Euromaidan protest. This support the ideas of Wadsworth (1996), that upon encountering something new, learners first reconcile it in some way with their previous ideas and experiences (in analysed cases—Euromaidan). The learning in analysed cases, thus, has subjective and affective (emotional) elements that come from

interpreting data in the light of their own previous experience such as Euromaidan. Despite the fact that initial intent of this research was to focus on the learning inside grassroots innovations niches, it become more important to look at the development of the critical consciousness as the whole, rather than the parts emerged inside these niches.

Naive transitivity

From Freire's perspective, Euromaidan' participation stage can be seen as a naive transitivity (see figure 3, p. 234). It is already a step forward from semi-intransitivity of consciousness, where people are only concerned with individual surviving. In the analysed cases, participants of the Euromaidan were able to see beyond worries about personal problems and through dialog and actions with others, they established a protest camp. This camp became a space where they were able to share and analyse their individual problems. The new vision of well-functioning society was born in this camp, through dialog and action (experience) together. Several learning outcomes emerged from experiencing/practicing these ideas. Among them, the majority of the respondents mentioned first order learning outcomes (such as teambuilding, organization skills, networking and similar) as well as second-order learning (solidarity, sharing and responsibility).

Examples of reported personal responsibility, caring, sharing and solidarity are numerous at this stage. This shows a big step made by the respondents—from being concerned with own personal surviving or a *Homini Lupus* (Lowy & Betto, 2003) or *Homo Sovieticus* (Levada & Golov, 1993) identities to naive transitivity as discussed by Freire (1973). It is important to stress the collective dimension of knowledge and learning at this stage, so called interpsychological learning by Vygotsky (1978)—learning and transforming the world together, 'togetherness' as was mentioned by the participants.

Learning at Euromaidan was not simply the assimilation and accommodation of new knowledge; it was the process by which learners were integrated into a Euromaidan knowledge community—the utopic city that they had created. Most of the respondents stated learning though dialog and action together in this utopic world (see figure 4, p. 240). This resonates with Vygotsky (1978) arguments that the learning process originates in, and must therefore be explained as a product of social interactions. This also goes in line with Freire's ideas stating that things such as responsibility is not something that can be acquired intellectually, but can only be learned through experience and dialog (see figure 4, p. 240). Consequently, dialog and action (*ibid.*) were the main learning processes at the Euromaidan protest time. Reflection as well as increased efficacy and a sense of agency were not mentioned by the respondents at this stage.
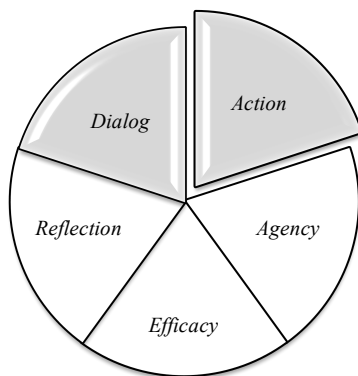
Figure 4. Elements of critical consciousness development observed during the Euromaidan protest.

Reflection

After Euromaidan was over, most of the respondents reported reflecting on the actions of taking part in the protest. This can be described as a personal internal reflection that Vygotsky (1978) refers as intrapsychological learning. This means that participants of Euromaidan first learned on the social level (interpsychological) and, later on, on the individual level by reflecting (intrapsychological). This stage seems to be integral for all the respondents. It defined how the knowledge acquired during the process was used afterwards. From a Freirean perspective, this is a stage where participants' knowledge can either turn into critical consciousness which would result in a more in-depth analysis of problems and an increase in political efficacy and agency (e.g. creating or joining initiatives) or can lead to fanaticized consciousness that is even more distanced from reality or returning to naive transitivity (see figure 3, p. 234). In this study, respondents reacted to the internal refection by creating/joining grassroots initiatives. Most[6] of the respondents mentioned increased political efficacy and agency as an argument for this. Thus, by acquiring a critical level of consciousness and by feeling empowered to act, participants were able to join or create grassroots initiatives. The learning at this stage thus can be described by active reflection and increased level of efficacy and agency (see figure 5, p. 240).
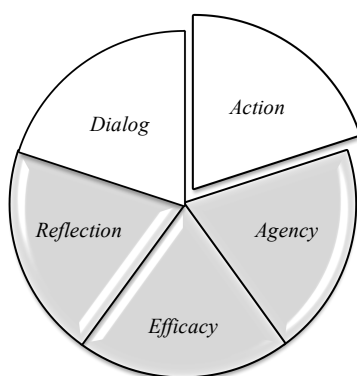
Figure 5. Elements of critical consciousness development observed during the post - Euromaidan reflection stage

Action or critical consciousness

The learning development process did not stop at the stage of creating/join of initiatives. Rather, a new iterative circle of learning and critical consciousness development began, based on the previous experience. Participants reported numerous learning outcomes: tools to grow food (first order learning) or cooperation (second-order learning). Among second order learning, this study identified social, economic and environmental outcomes. While many participants still referred to the solidarity and personal responsibility learned from Euromaidan, they have already developed a deeper understanding of these concepts. It allowed participants to make sense of this knowledge and further apply it in a constructive way, as one of the respondent mentioned 'I have seen what cooperation really means. There was no competition and there was no need for competition [...] I continued in the same way by creating Murahy'. Thus, we can see critical consciousness in action at this stage. The specifics of the online initiatives (online platform), limits possibilities for participants engage in a face-to-face dialog with each other. That is why learning through dialog was not identified at this stage. Similar not so many respondents were talking about agency and efficacy acquired by participating in online initiatives (see figure 6, p. 241).
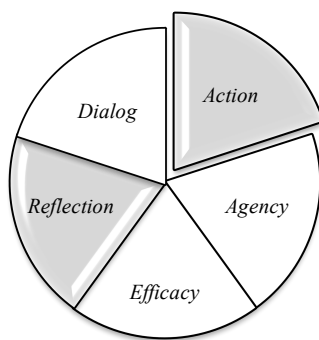

Figure 6. Elements of critical consciousness development observed during grassroots initiatives' participation stage

Learning for sustainability transition

In this study, I observed a number of different first and second-order learning outcomes among respondents from two grassroots initiatives, as was suggested by SNM' scholars e.g. Hoogma (2002). These outcomes were consistent with sustainability transition literature (e.g. Francis, 2015; Jackson, 2011; Schneider et al., 2010). Participants spoke about values described in such literature—solidarity, responsibility, importance of sharing and mutual help. In addition, they were involved in the practical implementation of the sustainability transition ideas. Participants were exchanging or selling unwanted items and thus, reducing waste, supporting societal development, and practicing alternative mechanisms of economic relation; something that scholars from academia have been struggling to promote theoretically since at least the 1970s, when *Limits to Growth* was published (Meadows et al., 1972). More important, participants expressed concerns and values that go beyond their everyday personal survival. They questioned the existing social interaction system and recognized their own responsibility for the way things are. As one participant mentioned 'I cannot be passive as I was before'. All together these can be seen as signs of critical consciousness emergence described by Freire (1973) and transformation of a *Homini Lupus* and *Homo Sovieticus* that is an important part of sustainability transition. One would also assume that participants of

social economy initiatives are particularly concerned with the economic aspects of sustainability transition. However, this study did not identify a deeper critique of current economic systems or a reflection on unlimited growth that was argued to be a vital part of the sustainability transformation. Rather, some respondents of Plushkin were more concerned with their own economic surviving; something that Freire would refer to as semi-intransitivity.

Indeed, practising sharing, exchanging and alternative social values such as solidarity and responsibility in these cases did not arise from dissatisfaction with the current economic system; but from previous social experiences acquired during Euromaidan participation. This explains the main focus of participants on the social aspects of sustainability transition. While not being the most productive space for learning, the online platforms do keep alive some of the aspirations that motivated people to become part of the Euromaidan protest. In this sense, such social initiatives can reaffirm solidarities. Keeping in mind that critical consciousness can be obtained but can be lost; reaffirming function of social initiatives seems to be vital. The online platforms keep the values and priorities of the participants "alive" and ensure that the critical consciousness that was acquired does not simply slide backwards. Without real life practices, people can turn cynical or radical and then gradually turn away from the ideas and values that inspired them. This means, finding ways to enact these values along the lines of the social economy projects keeps the critical consciousness ticking away.

However, it does not mean that deeper learning and development of profound understanding of the economic aspect of sustainability transition is not feasible with time in the analysed cases. It is already possible to observe some initial leanings in this direction. For example, participants from Plushkin are questioning a need to 'constantly buying things from supermarkets and supporting the riches'; while a respondent from Murahy talks about the importance of non-materialistic values that are 'falling out of the current economic system'.

Conclusions

The study confirms that learning for sustainability transition can be found in a context that is not seen as educative or as learning bodies—grassroots innovations niches. This includes learning both values, such as solidarity and responsibility; as well as practices for sustainability transition, like sharing and exchanging mechanisms of economic relation. In addition, study has identified signs of consciousness transformation from a *Homini Lupus, Homo Sovieticus* and being preoccupied with only one's day to day surviving to critical consciousness, as described by Freire. This study revealed that grassroots innovations niches can be a place where this critical consciousness can be reaffirmed, nourished and possibly further developed. Learning inside grassroots initiation niches is much more connected to previous experience and current external landscape, than to inner niche learning interactions. These findings once again prove experience based learning theories. In particular, the importance social protest event—such as Euromaidan was identified; showing its effect on participants' actions and reflections. But questions emerge: do shocking events like Euromaidan protest have to happen in order to accelerate learning about values of solidarity and responsibility, as well as to develop critical consciousness needed for sustainability transition practices creation?

Despite the impossibility to completely answer this question, this study gave some tips, suggesting components of critical conscious development needed for this type of learning—dialog, reflection, action, leading to increase in efficacy and agency. If dialog, action and reflection together with an increased sense of agency and political efficacy are present; there are high chances for critical consciousness development. Critical consciousness can further lead to changes both in values and practises of the grassroots innovations participants. These types of collective changes are argued to have a potential to challenge the dominant power structures of the political, social and in some way economic system (Young & Middlemiss, 2012). This is something 'citizenship of the market' cannot do (Seyfang, 2005) but collective change can possibly make a difference. The analysed cases are still very "new" (created in 2014, 2015) and thus did not show a great effect in terms of social change, especially regarding challenging existing economic growth paradigm. However, they did exhibit a potential for critical consciousness development needed for sustainability transition that can be an inspiration for others.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] SNM is a term used to describe management approaches that are developed to support the societal introduction of radical sustainable innovations. Usually it is focused on technological innovations, such as wind energy or biogas, transport systems and ecological food production.
[2] However, this study is primarily explorative in nature and does not aim to provide a representative comprehensive analysis of all the positions and actors involved in grassroots innovations in Ukraine. Rather, it attempts to pinpoint general trends in the selected examples.
[3] https://plushkin.org, accessed January 2016.
[4] https://www.facebook.com/murahy/, accessed January 2016.
[5] http://murahy.com, accessed May 2016.
[6] It is important to note that this study focused only on grassroots innovations' creators and participants who after reflecting on Euromaidan participation decided to act by joining these innovations initiatives. Thus, it represents only linear critical consciousness development trajectory. It did not cover other Euromaidan protesters who probably did not experience increase in agency or political efficacy or turned into less constructive activities.

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The educational potential of social economy projects in the Himalayas: the case of Avani

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Abstract

In this article we analyze the social economy projects of Avani – a Community Based Organization based in Himalayas and reflect on their potential for enabling a critical pedagogy of place. We use the concept of tactics in a spatial and educational sense to explore Avani's projects as an intervention within the dominant place logic of capitalism that opens market opportunities and enables new experiences of living and being for hill communities. We argue that these experiences are educational since they invoke, what we want to call, the possibility to verify one's equality and one's ability to do something. Our study is based on an ethnographic case approach and combines literature review, staff interviews and documents of Avani along with sensitizing concepts to guide our analysis.

Keywords: tactics; pedagogic subjectivation; critical pedagogy; community based organization, India

Introduction

Reflections on 'social economy' projects as incubators of adult learning, emancipation and democratization are not new. In fact, in the beginning of the 20th century, cooperative organizations (such as self-help groups, mutual insurance groups or trade unions) were an important source of inspiration for prominent adult learning theorists like Mary Parker Follett (1924) and Eduard Lindeman (1989). When we talk of 'social

economy' projects today however we do not (only) refer to these 'traditional' examples of the cooperative movement. Social economy today encompasses a much greater variety of organizations and projects; from Grameen Bank, to Community Supported Agriculture to Fair Trade projects to training companies,[1] all these organizations are referred to as social economy projects. What brings this diverse group of organizations together, is that they do not only pursue profit but also seek to pursue social goals, thus inserting principles of social justice into their economic operations (Moulaert & Ailenei, 2005; Quarter, 1992). The term 'social economy' has been more popular in the North. NGOs in India that follow a similar approach i.e. raise funds through commercial activities to support their social mission are registered as a trust or society (Edwards & Hulme, 1996). In line with the cooperative movement of early 20th century, these social economy projects often contain a promise of empowerment, solidarity, democracy and sustainability. They contain a promise of empowering marginalized people and of giving room to marginalized issues (climate, poverty alleviation, conservation etc.). Yet it is unclear to which extent and within which limitations these promises can be fulfilled. To which extent do these organizations really empower, enable new ways of living? Do these organizations truly embody an alternative? Or are they merely 'capitalism in disguise'? Under which conditions do these projects realize the educational possibilities for the marginalized communities they cater to? How do they bring about the possibilities for education within the scope of their social economy projects? What are the strengths, limitations and trade-offs that these projects are confronted with when combining social goals with economic operations? There is a growing interest in these types of projects - in the practical, policy making as well as academic field – but still many questions remain unanswered.

In this paper we make a modest contribution to finding answers to these questions. We present a case study of the social economy projects of Avani, an organization that aims to create "opportunities for rural women and men to find viable employment through a self-sufficient and environmentally sustainable supply chain" in the Kumaon region of Uttarakhand, nested in the Indian Himalayas (Avani-Kumaon, n.d.). We analyze how social economy projects generate new experiences and stimulates new ways of being and living for the marginalized people of Kumaon. Taking an educational standpoint, we focus and theorize predominantly on how the experiences generated by social economy interventions can stimulate the hill people to critically reflect and act upon the dominant socio-economic structures that impact their lives. We will in particular explore how Avani's projects on textile making and renewable energy, enable local rural communities to pursue better opportunities for living and being in the hills. Given the project's obvious social economy orientation, we will explore what conditions makes these experiences educational and how Avani makes it possible by taking up a halfway position in a variety of ways.

We have structured this article as follows. We begin with a short discussion on the methodology followed by an examination of the Himalayas as a place confronted with double marginalization. Against the backdrop of marginalization, we give a brief overview of Avani's vision, organizational structure and our focal projects for this article. Then, we turn to explore the new experiences fostered by Avani in their projects in terms of the new ways of being and living, which we discovered through our empirical research. Further, taking into consideration the criticisms against Avani's projects, we show how living and being experiences can be educational and the educational condition of 'suspension' that makes it possible. In a last part we analyze how suspension is enabled by Avani's choice to position itself as a halfway point of

connection. Lastly, we conclude by pointing out the fragility of these moments of suspension that opens some new questions for further research.

Methodology

Our analysis is based on an ethnographic study of Avani's projects, which was undertaken in two phases, June-Aug 2012 and July-Sep 2014. During these phases, we undertook 35 interviews and 2 focus group discussions with hill communities, 6 staff interviews and analyzed official documents along with academic literature. Our interviewees from the hill communities were chosen from 3 villages – Chachret, Tunera & Morari using snowball sampling method. In these interviews, we explored their experiences of participating in Avani's projects on textile making and renewable energy. We deepened the insights from these interviews by holding focus group discussions with women (since they comprise the vast majority of participants) from Chachret (between 50-65 years) and Morari (14-25 years) where we delved into their conflicts and expectations in relation to the projects. In our interviews with Avani's staff members, we explored the vision underlying Avani's projects as well as their challenges in developing and implementing new initiatives. The official documents we studied included annual reports from 1998-99 to 2014-15, Avani's business plans and organizational report as well as project report and grant proposals for textile and renewable energy projects. These documents gave us an insight into Avani's role as a community organization, their long-term goals in developing new projects as well as the intricate issues of collaborating with local communities and other stakeholders. These multiple sources of data were used for the purpose of triangulation during data collection as well as data analysis.

Our analysis was primarily guided by the sensitizing notion (Blumer, 1954) of tactics (de Certeau, 1988) which we tried to understand both in terms of its spatial and educational relevance. The notion of tactics (de Certeau, 1988) was drawn from the literature for its usefulness in accounting for acts of subversion by the weak against a repressive context created by the powerful. Tactics is a concept that has stimulated us to understand the significance of Avani's projects and their way of enabling the hill communities to create a niche within the global capital economy. To understand the spatial relevance of tactics, we drew on the writings of David Harvey, (2003) a prominent social geographer. His ideas on the dominance of capitalism on place allow us to show how Avani's projects act as a counter dynamic. Since we wanted to understand this notion of tactics in its educational sense also, we drew inspiration from Masschelein and Simons's (2013; 2010) analysis of what makes education possible. Their notion of 'pedagogic subjectivation' (Simons & Masschelein, 2010) helped us to analyze the experiences of potentiality enabled within Avani's projects as being educational. These potentialities are about being able to live and be in new ways that allow hill communities to critically reflect and act towards their place. For our analysis, we choose these particular sensitizing concepts because we want to focus on the educational process within Avani's projects. In this sense, we are in line with J.K. Gibson-Graham's (2014; 2013) attempt to develop a vocabulary of economic practices that is different from a capitalistic one. However our focus differs from Gibson-Graham as we want to develop a vocabulary of education based on Avani's social economy projects. Based on the sensitizing notions of tactics and 'pedagogic subjectivation', we want to answer the following research question:

How do Avani's social economy projects circumvent the dominant capitalist economy to evoke possibilities for new experiences of living and being that are educational?

Avani and the Himalayan hills

Avani was started in 1997 with the purpose of creating "opportunities for rural communities to find viable employment through a self-sufficient and environmentally sustainable supply chain" (Avani-Kumaon, n.d.). They work with isolated farming communities in the Kumaon region of Uttarakhand, India and have a presence in over 108 villages in the districts of Bageshwar and Pithoragarh that comprise some of the most geographically remote areas in Uttarakhand (Avani-Kumaon, n.d.). In this section we will briefly introduce the social economy projects of Avani. But before that we will scrutinize the background of double marginalization of this particular region against which these projects have been developed.

The Himalayan hills: a double marginalization

The marginalization of the remote and isolated villages in the Central Himalayan mountain ranges of Uttarakhand can be traced back to the early beginnings of commercial forestry in this region (Guha, 2000, p. 56). Commercial forestry gained an impetus after the government's 1878 act which reserved local forests for economic activities (Guha, 2000, p. 38). Traditionally the forests belonged to hill communities and were used by them for sustaining their daily needs. After the act was passed, hill communities could no longer assert their communal rights over the forests to carry out their subsistence activities (Rangan, 2004). Interlinked with this process of resource exploitation, the hill region was also excluded from benefitting from the profits accrued through economic activities (Guha, 2000, p. 141; Gupta, 2015; Rangan, 2004). Thus, the use of the hill's natural resources for economic activities installed two interconnected processes of marginalization: being pushed at the margin as a subsistence economy, indigenous to the hill community and being pushed at the margin of the global capital economy as a hill region. Below we elaborate on both processes of marginalization and reflect upon them in light of the spatial characteristics of the Himalayan hills.

The hill community's marginalization as a subsistence economy has been attributed to the Indian government's policies that overtook the rights of small peasants in favor of big investors to promote capitalistic production (Banerjee-Guha, 2013; Gadgil & Guha, 1995; Randeria, 2007; Williams & Mawdsley, 2006). The loss of traditional rights of use over the forests threatened the very survival of the hill communities since they relied on its use values in order to meet their everyday needs. The forests were the main source of fodder, firewood and its non-timber produce like resin, grass, fruits and nuts were frequently used for petty trade (Guha, 2000). Apart from sustaining daily needs, the hill community's relation with nature was tied to socio-cultural belief systems wherein care for the environment was regulated within the community through forms of worship, taboos regarding resource exploitation, conservation ethics and community norms of usage (Negi, 2010). However, with the introduction of commercial forestry, these indigenous practices were prohibited because they were deemed as unscientific, which made it easier for the government to pursue its agenda of commercial exploitation of forests (Guha, 2000). Consequently the hill community could no longer carry on subsistence activities as their traditional rights were reneged under the guise of commercial forestry.

The hill region became marginalized in a second way when the economic opportunities around the use of indigenous resources were reserved for the development of the plains while the hills were neglected. As pointed by several researchers already (Bahuguna, 1982; Berreman, 1989; Bhatt, 1988; Gadgil & Guha, 1993; Shiva & Bandyopadhyay, 1986), Indian government's policy to use hill resources as raw materials for industries located in the plains contributed to the hill's economic marginalization. The government was denounced for using the hill's resources to promote industrialization in the plains while ignoring the indigenous development of the hill areas. This resulted in a growing regional inequality between the hills and the plains wherein the hills were pushed to the brink of poverty while the plains continued to prosper. This situation of inequality is known as *pahar-maidan* (hill-plains) conflict in local parlance (Jayal, 2000). With India's meteoric rise in the global capital economy in recent decades, this regional inequality has only intensified compelling hill people to migrate in search of better living opportunities (Rangan, 2004).

To enhance our understanding of the hill's marginalization in relation to its spatial characteristics, we turn to Harvey's theorization on the role of place in the functioning of capitalism. According to Harvey (1993), capitalism depends on places that are amenable to constructing 'built environments' such as buildings, roads, airports and other modern infrastructure necessary for production and sale of goods. These forms of 'built environments' act as a means to efficiently mobilize production inputs such as raw materials, capital, labor, markets and technology, which are necessary for capitalism to function. Therefore, places that are capable of supporting such infrastructure are deemed favorable for capital investment, which Harvey terms as the market logic of place (Harvey, 2005).

However places are unequal in their capacity to adopt the logic of market (Harvey, 1993). Going back to our case, the difficult terrain and fragile environment of hills cannot support the infrastructural amenities required for capitalism to function (Mehta, 1999; Mittal, Tripathi, & Sethi, 2008). Consequently hills were neglected for investment while the plains were able to easily become centers of capitalistic production owing to the ease of connectivity and its infrastructural endowments (Rangan, 2004). Although the hill region's geographical characteristics rendered it unfavorable for capitalistic production, its rich natural resources were valued for capitalistic production, as exemplified by the practice of commercial forestry. By restricting the communal control and use of forests – through government policies and acts prohibiting traditional practices, the hill people were prevented from using them for subsistence activities (Guha, 2000). Instead, these resources began to be used for commercial purpose of industries located in the plains, thereby necessitating migration to the plains in search of livelihood. Such strategies, which Harvey (2003, p. 145) terms as 'accumulation by dispossession' are reflected in the way plains were developed by dispossessing the hills of its human and ecological resources.

Avani's choice for social economy projects

It is against this background of marginalization, Avani, as a Community Based Organization[2], chose to develop their social economy projects. In these projects Avani does not only aim to make profit, but also seeks to pursue social goals, thus inserting principles of social justice into their economic operations (Moulaert & Ailenei, 2005; Quarter, 1992). Indeed, Avani asserts that every "business decision related to Avani products is guided by a strong responsibility toward environmental best practices and sensitivity to the cultural context of the villages" where they work (Organization Report,

Avani). Driven by the tripartite aims of "economy, ecology and empowerment" (Avani-Kumaon, n.d.), Avani claims to be committed to developing innovative approaches to sustainable development in collaboration with hill communities. Based on this vision, they promote rural artisans (weavers, knitters, spinners etc.)[3] to form cooperatives and strengthen their capacity to create commercial products by providing them with technical and market inputs (Organization Report, Avani).

Avani works in a decentralized fashion, wherein it positions itself as a voluntary organization that works with producer cooperatives to facilitate their capacity for production and sales. These cooperatives are run independently from Avani through a core team, that is democratically elected from among the cooperative's own members and are wholly responsible for production. The members are co-owners as well as workers with a share in the profits of the enterprise. They depend on Avani for support facilities to sell their products in the international market and also for investment in their capacity building. Though Avani doesn't use the term social economy and is legally registered as a 'society', it shares a number of principles associated with social economy initiatives, in terms of democratic functioning, prioritizing service to community over profit and autonomous management (Defourny, Grønbjerg, Meijs, Nyssens, & Yamauchi, 2016). Drawing on these principles, Avani has forayed into a variety of sustainable development areas - in renewable energy, craftwork, natural pigments, textiles and organic farming, but as mentioned earlier, we will focus on two of Avani's major development enterprises: dealing with textiles and renewable energy. Below we give a brief overview of these projects.

Their textile enterprise called 'Earthcraft', brings together weavers, spinners, dyers and farmers in order to create a line of handmade textiles (Business Plan, Avani). Avani uses local plant species and traditional handicraft skills to create their products. In this process, traditional skills such as weaving and threading are being revived and upgraded to match market standards. To ensure that their production processes are environment friendly, they experiment with weeds and those plant species that do not have existing commercial use to create an innovative line of fabrics and pigments (Grant Proposal, Earthcraft). The focus on using local resources in an ecological manner is also reflected in their renewable energy project, named 'Avani Bio-Energy'. For this project, Avani pioneered the use of pine needles as a fuel for generating electricity. Pine needles are highly inflammable leaves of pine trees that are a major cause of forest fires in Himalayas. By developing commercial use of pine needles, Avani's bio-energy project not only conserves the environment but also creates local livelihood opportunities for the villagers. Moreover, the ash residues are converted into smokeless charcoal for use as cooking fuel for village communities, as an alternative to firewood (Grant Proposal, Avani's Bio-Energy Pvt. Ltd.). For both these projects, Avani has partnered with institutions based outside the hills; in order to consult technical experts as needed and access niche markets that can support their innovations (Annual Report 2009).

Avani's project giving rise to educational experiences

The aims of these two social economy projects, 'Earthcraft' and 'Avani Bio-Energy', were to create livelihood opportunities and conserve the local environment. As our analysis below will show, in fulfilling these aims, Avani fosters a range of experiences for hill communities (particularly for women) that were not possible for them before. We regard these experiences to be educational since they invoke, what we want to call, the 'potentiality' within hill communities to be able to live and be in new ways. We will

introduce the notion of 'pedagogic subjectivation' (Simons & Masschelein, 2010) to deepen our understanding of how these experiences of potentiality enabled within Avani's projects can be regarded as educational.

New ways of being and living

Key to the new experiences that are enhanced by Avani is the possibility for hill people to become producers to the market of the plains. Whereas earlier they were predominantly passive consumers of the products of the capitalist market dependent on migrant remittances, the project of Avani enables them to take up a productive position. As producers of textiles, they discover a new way of being in the market. They also gain decision-making capacity to determine the kind of goods made, its quality, environmental impact and of course earn from it. This capacity to produce goods and contribute to the market allows them to draw benefit from the sale of their products. As producers, they have the opportunity to earn and become financially independent, which is a great shift in experience for hill women especially. In this regard, Rashmi Bharti, Avani's director shares her view (Personal Interview, 5th Aug 2014)

> Women who are disadvantaged… and there is lot of abandonment, second and third marriages and no rights [are being] given to the first wife, second wife, you know… so lot of this category of women who needed a source of income have become a part of what we do and they have educated their children though help facilities have been provided by the women themselves.

Avani's practices allow women to become capable of independently earning their means of living without necessarily depending on male family members, as is the norm in the hill's patriarchal culture. With the capacity for financial independence, hill women, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds have found a means to position themselves in new ways within the hill community. Connected to this capacity for earning and producing is their ability to acquire better material conditions of living. Furthermore, hill people have been accustomed to consuming inferior quality products from the market due to lack of alternatives and suffer from its ill-impact on their health and well-being. As Rashmi Bharti, Avani's director, shares her view below (Personal Interview, 5th Aug 2014)

> All remote rural areas are dumping grounds for all kinds of consumer goods starting from medicines to bad quality foods. And all companies are doing that… so the village population is treated like this amorphous idiotic hole, which doesn't exactly know what they are doing...

As producers with independent access to financial means, hill people have now revived traditional products like 'organic *Kumkum[4]*' for their daily use instead of using the synthetic *Kumkum* from the market that is harmful. They do not need to rely on the low quality chemical products that come from the plains and are being dumped on their communities but have now the possibility to use a healthier, locally made product. This allows them to be able to consume better products for their daily use and enhance their living standards.

These new ways of producing, consuming and earning in their own place have enabled hill communities to embrace new ways of being an indigenous people. This is an important step to ensure that indigenous skills remained relevant for the younger

generation whose choices have been shaped by capitalistic influence. Rashmi Bharti (Personal Interview, 5th Aug 2014) talks about it in the excerpt below

> There used to be traditional soaps and there were 3 plants that those women were using even until about 40 years ago, for washing hair and for washing floors… but the current generation thinks that *Sunsilk* is the ultimate thing but it's not like they don't want to use [plants]but it is because they don't know about it now.

The rich ecological knowledge that allowed older generations to be self-sufficient in fulfilling their daily needs has been lost within the younger generation. With this loss of traditional know-how, capitalism has turned them into dependent consumers. Avani's projects stimulate the hill people with possibilities to (re)discover and re-shape their position as an indigenous culture. It stimulates the active use of indigenous skills.

By creating an economic basis for the revival of traditional skills, hill communities are experiencing also new ways of cooperation and collaboration in pursuing development. In the Earthcraft project, for instance farmers and artists could collaborate as textile producers. This allowed them to come together and build a productive enterprise where they share mutual concerns and goals, thereby enabling a sense of solidarity among the community. The bringing together of diverse rural artisans and farmer in a shared economic project enables them to build their economic strength as a cooperative.

Conceptualizing Avani's projects as educational

Our short analysis of the kind of experiences that become possible within Avani's projects should not be read as an attempt to give a very positive image of what Avani does in these remote communities. In our research we came across a host of tensions, hostilities and risks that are also very much a part of Avani's projects. We tried to explore them further during interviews with hill communities and Avani staff members. A key tension is that Avani is operating in a manner that incorporates care for the environment and social justice within the framework of a market practice. Its 'alternative character' of offering new possibilities merely allows a leeway and should thus not be interpreted as 'radically overthrowing' the dominant system. Its fragility becomes apparent when we consider that hill men do not consider Avani's projects as a viable livelihood option for them. In our interviews, hill men claimed to prefer working for 'proper jobs in a proper company', in a city and found Avani's projects too rudimentary to be considered worthwhile. This is because Avani's choice to use traditional skills and simple technology made them feel that it was unsuitable for their caliber and status (Interview with hill men, Aug 2014). The men described Avani's livelihood opportunities as "insignificant", "technologically deficient" and "worthwhile only for the desperately poor" during the interviews and subsequently expressed their reservations about participating in it. Avani's projects thus do not directly reach out to the whole community, and remain mostly confined to women folk (Interview with Rajnish Jain, Avani's director). More importantly, this also generated frustration and irritation in the community. Indeed, some of these men were quite disturbed by the fact that their wives, who used to financially depend upon them, now earn their own money (Interview with Savitri, Chachret). Women report that this creates problems at the household level due to marital conflicts (Focus group discussion, Chachret). It can thus be wondered, if Avani, by introducing an economic project and targeting women as

money-makers, does not potentially and in a quite radical way disrupt the traditional values that used to regulate household life in the hill society.

Moreover, it could be asked if Avani doesn't stimulate competition and individualism in the hill society, thus destroying the collectivist values that used to support the hill community? Since our research project did not aim to uncover how the community values have changed under the influence of the work of Avani, we have insufficient data to make strong claims regarding this issue. Further research is needed. Yet, it is worth mentioning that research (Ball, 2001) suggests that the introduction of economic projects in collectivist societies, can both strengthen and destroy collectivist values. Often in a first stage, just after when the economic project has been introduced, collectivist values erode and individualization is introduced. However, this does not necessarily have to lead to a more opportunistic and socially disintegrated society. If cooperative values – other than the traditional values are stimulated, then the economic projects can actually contribute to reinforcing or strengthening collectivism. With collaboration and cooperation, and mutually shared values being promoted in the cooperative structures that the women are organized in, it is thus at first sight probable that these projects do not lead to individualization (Ball, 2001). Nevertheless, with men not being part of this cooperative decision-making structure, this might be 'jumping to conclusions' (Ratner, 2009).

Despite the criticisms that can be leveled against Avani's practices, we want to argue that from an educational perspective, it is important to emphasize that Avani does enable hill communities to enhance their ability to act upon the world through the experiences we showed before. We draw upon the concept of tactics to understand what Avani does within these projects spatially, while at the same time also creating educational possibilities within them. Tactics inspires us to analyze the way Avani makes an alternative use of the characteristics of hill region to circumvent the dominant place logic of capitalism. In particular, it steers our focus on how Avani takes advantage of the 'cracks' in the place logic of capitalism to create market practices that benefit hill communities. This is exemplified by Avani's choice to depend on the hill's wild plants, weeds – resources that are not used commercially – to make innovative products. It allows hill communities to draw upon their indigenous knowledge in experimenting with local plants and develop products inspired by the hill region, making it a place of production. It is this particular use of hill resources to enable new kind of market practices that we regard as a kind of place tactic.

It is the place tactics of Avani that opens opportunities for hill communities to become capable of actively setting their own terms of market exchange and hence overcome their marginalization within the capitalist economy. Avani's projects allow hill communities to circumvent the limitations of the dominant place logic and create a position for themselves as part of the capitalist order. Their orientation towards enabling marginalized communities to create a position of equality within the dominant order is in line with the emancipatory ideals that social economy projects are known for. This outcome of social reform, is in fact how social economy projects tend to justify their work and define their mission for emancipation (Moulaert & Ailenei, 2005).

But, in this article, we want to emphasize another possibility for emancipation stimulated by Avani that goes beyond the achievement of project outcomes and is in fact rooted within the processes of the project itself. Here we align ourselves with educational philosopher Joris Vlieghe (2014) who offers a distinct perspective on critical pedagogy that goes beyond the customary idea of an education for emancipation, enabling the marginalized to acquire a better position in the societal order. He argues that this view fails to value the possible intrinsic emancipatory value of educational

processes. According to Vlieghe it is important to locate emancipation also within the practices itself, which he terms as educational emancipation. Vlieghe (2014) takes a Rancerian perspective to argue that the possibility to verify one's equality and experience one's ability to do something is emancipatory in itself.

We also draw inspiration from Simons & Masschelein (2010) who reserve the concept of 'pedagogic subjectivation' to refer to experiences of being able to act, to see, to be etc. as being educational. Their conception of pedagogic subjectivation is derived from the school context, which they construe as a space that is in between where students come from and what they will become as adults. In the space of the school, students are introduced to school material (Art, Literature etc.) as a means of sparking their interest in the world and developing their own relation to the world in this process. Studying the school material is a means for students to understand the world without conforming to the practical ways of use in the real world (say, to create a particular painting). The purpose is for students to be able to experience their own potentiality to think, speak, understand etc. as part of the world. Here the school material is not merely an object of knowledge but a means for students to relate to the world as someone who is 'able to'. It is this being 'able to' that forms the crux of an educational practice. The school, in this sense, is that space that separates students from their social origins and their future profession to give them the possibility to develop their own relation with the world through the material they study.

In a similar way, Avani's projects provide the space where hill communities get the opportunity to work with hill resources in order to live and be in new ways. Avani's projects act as a space for hill communities to innovate new uses of hill resources, such as developing pine needles as a fuel and using wild plants such as myroblan, and eupatorium for extracting pigments in order to create their own Himalayan products. Pine needles (a forest weed) have been traditionally used as fodder and for household heating purposes and are a major cause of forest fire in the hill region. Drawing on its combustive properties, hill communities and Avani collaborated to experiment its properties as a fuel for electricity generation (Annual report 2011-12). In other words, Avani makes hill resources available so that hill communities can freely work with them. This is according to Masschelein and Simons (2013) an important act of education which they refer to as 'suspension'. The availability of resources for free experimentation acts as a means of generating an interest towards the world and re-connect with the world under new terms. For hill people, the possibility to use local resources to create products that are organic and ecofriendly allows them to relate themselves to the outside world as an ethical and ecologically conscious community.

In our case suspension is about purposefully choosing to use those resources that are not bound by regulations in the way they are to be used and hence available for free experimentation. For Simons and Masschelein (2013) suspension is an act of de-familiarization that sets a task or place free of the usual norms that determine its use. The space of the school is a space of de-appropriation, where all students are treated the same irrespective of their social origins or future career and their school material (art, literature etc.) no longer conforms to its regular use in the world (to create paintings, or write books etc.) and simply become means of study. Thus, the four walls of the schools effectively create the possibility for students to explore school material that comes from the real world and be 'able to' do something with it, in their own way. Below, we analyze how Avani's projects, though not confined by four walls, similarly generate suspension by the very way Avani physically takes up a halfway position between the hills and the plains. This enables Avani to maintain a distance from the logic of the

capitalist market and enables hill communities to have a free space to work with hill resources.

Taking a Halfway position to enable the educational condition of suspension

Avani's head office is situated on a main road, halfway between the closest town – Berinag and the remote villages. As such the project physically occupies and creates a halfway point of connection between the hills and the plains. Their office creates an access point for isolated hill villages to access credit facilities, consultants and the markets of the plains. In establishing a connection, the office bridges the gap between the hills and the plains and acts as nodal point to bring diverse stakeholders from the hills and the plains to collaborate in their projects. But this halfway position creates at once a point of connection with and a distance from the plains and capitalism. What Avani tries to do is to create a point of connection with the plains on the terms of the hill people. Whereas before the relationship between the plains and the hills was characterized by some form of predation in which the hills were overwhelmed by the capitalist system, being exploited, not being given any choice, Avani contributes to new form of connections with the plains in which the hill people can set the conditions of the connection and thus keep the exploitative power of capitalist market at a distance. Based on our analysis of documents and of the interviews with Avani staff we arrive at three important ways of taking up this halfway position: between subsistence and capitalist economy, between donor and community concerns, and lastly between professional design experts and traditional hill artists.

In a first move, Avani's spatial halfway position makes it possible for knowledge and skills used within the subsistence economy of the hills to find new forms of expression within the capitalist economy. It allows Avani to position itself halfway between the subsistence economy and capitalist economy by creating market practices that depend on locally available raw materials, traditional skills and cultural heritage of the hills. To take an example, the Earthcraft project experiments with forest weeds that normally harm the environment to create handspun natural fabric, draw new pigments and contribute to new ways of local production techniques that are environment friendly. Their choice to use plant species that are not already exploited commercially as raw materials opens up new reservoirs of resources for commercial use and promotes farmers to engage in their conservation and protection. Such experiments with local skills and resources have resulted in innovative products such as natural indigo (a pigment) and pine needle based gasifier (a technological innovation) that bears the Himalayan stamp. This approach shows how subsistence culture can be built into economic practices and reflects the possibility for hill communities to explore new ways of using resources, production processes, techniques and handling environmental impact that is determined by how they want to live and be in their place.

Further, Avani's spatial location allows them to take a halfway position between the donor led development agenda and the community concerns since they are known for representing grassroots issues to international donors. In relation to this intermediary position of NGOs, Rajnish Jain, Avani's director (Personal Interview, 10th Aug 2014) shares his view below.

> You know there is a lot of emphasis in the world in last few decades in involving NGOs in the development agendas... and so driven from the international donors you know... governments are also arm twisted in roping an NGO in the development agenda... these NGOs are actually implementing the agenda for that particular program.... [NGOs]

should be helping the government formulate policies and then implement that with their own machineries…

This quote shows how the international pressure to involve NGOs within development agendas is shaping their role to become service delivery agents of donors. As such, Avani's position offers a valuable point of connection for international donors to reach the isolated hill communities through their programs. However, as pointed in the quote, Avani does not prefer such a role but instead seeks a more independent role in developing the hills based on their own practices. This stance of Avani is critical in making their projects a free space that is not regulated by donor conditions and allows community members to articulate their concerns and expectations in designing the project. Lastly, Avani's location on the main road allows them to tap into the pool of expert professionals and interns located far outside the vicinity of the rural villages where their work is based. By connecting traditional crafts with professional expertise, Avani shows possibilities for the rural hill artists' enterprise to be able to position itself in the global market. However Avani's halfway position between professional experts and traditional village artists also creates a space where traditional skills and professional expertise are de-appropriated from their regular use, from its household use and factory use respectively and allows hill communities to blend the two in new ways that they deem as suitable.

Conclusion

In this article we scrutinize how social economy projects act as vehicles of social and economic empowerment. These projects are usually known for enabling marginalized communities to have better life opportunities and for their emancipatory agenda. We looked at their emancipatory potential, suggesting to consider them meaningful, not just for social and economic development but also as an educational space. Our analysis draws on the case of Avani, which enables hill communities to set their own terms of living and being by critically acting upon their place. The key concept in our analysis of Avani's projects is tactics (de Certeau, 1988). It is a concept that enabled us to understand the emancipatory potential in a spatial as well as an educational sense. Avani's projects strive to circumvent the inequalities perpetuated within the capitalist economy even while being a part of it. This is reflected in Avani's choice to use local resources to create innovative market practices and in doing so giving a tactical twist to what we have described as discriminatory place logic of capitalism. Avani renders the hills to become a place of production instead of being marginalized within capitalism. Avani's projects are considered emancipatory for their outcomes, that is, achieving social and economic emancipation of the hill people within capitalism.

What we came to in our analysis is that this spatial intervention of Avani makes it possible that another emancipatory process can occur. We locate this emancipatory process within the experiences that take place during the project itself and it is this process that makes social economy projects educational. Projects such as Avani's enable people to freely experiment with local resources in their own way and to experience their potentialities in this process. We use the theoretical lens of pedagogic subjectivation (Simons & Masschelein, 2010) to understand how these experiences are emancipatory in itself. We show how local resources act as a means of sparking the interest of hill people in the world and developing their own relation to the world. An essential condition of this educational emancipation is the act of suspension. It is about creating a free space where people can explore something from the world on their own

terms. Our research shows how social economy projects are important facilitators in creating this free space where the impact of the dominant order can be suspended to make educational emancipation possible. In the projects of Avani, their choice to use those resources, such as weeds and wild plants that have no existing commercial use and are thus free for experimentation makes suspension possible. It is further enabled by Avani's halfway position between hills and plains, capitalist economy and subsistence economy, donor agenda and community concerns, and finally professional artists and rural craftsmen.

We came to understand this act of suspension as a rather tenuous condition to maintain. This opens possibilities for further investigation. A first question is about the way this suspension can be made possible by social economy projects. In our research we analyzed one particular way of doing this. We analyzed how Avani chose to locate their office in a place halfway between hills and plains. This very physical halfway position makes it possible to balance between powerful external agents and the expectations of marginalized hill communities. A second question is about a better understanding of the risks posed by the hybrid identity of social enterprises to the possibility for emancipation. Their dual identity does open better life opportunities for marginalized communities, but at the same time it also puts these institutions at risk of being coerced by external agents to fulfill their demands, jeopardizing the scope for educational emancipation to take place. A third question is about how social economy projects value the possibility of educational emancipation as part of their agenda. For instance, it could be asked if Avani deems these emancipatory processes as important as processes of social and economic emancipation and how they want to maintain both processes. Lastly, this research also invites further exploration of how experiences of educational emancipation are shaping the traditional relations of cooperation among the participants of these projects. It would be interesting to examine hill women's perspectives on how their experiences in Avani's projects have stimulated them to relate to the outside world in another way and if it has led to any shifts in the traditional status quo between men and women.

Notes

[1] Defourny (2016) offers an interesting reflection on the different models that reflect different types of 'social economy projects, referring to a 'non-profit entrepreneurial'' model, a ''social cooperative'' model, a ''social business'' model and a public-sector social enterprise model.
[2] For the argument of our paper, it is sufficient to stick to this fairly general definition of social economy projects. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile pointing out that the search for a definition of "social economy" is an on-going search, which is filled with difficulties & complexities. More information on this issue can be found in works such (Defourny & Nyssens, 2007; Moulaert & Ailenei, 2005)
[3] "AVANI's team identifies clusters of farmers, weavers and dyers, who become co-owners in the enterprise through membership in a cooperative society. AVANI provides members of the cooperative a range of support services enhancing their output and livelihood opportunities, including access to essential raw materials (water, electricity, dyes), training in market designs, and standards for quality control." (Avani-Kumaon, n.d.)
[4] *Pethia /Kumkum* (vermillion) is a red powder used for cosmetic purposes.

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The social economy as produced space: the 'here and now' of education in constructing alternatives

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Abstract

This article approaches adult learning within the social economy through a critical and spatial lens. First, I approach the critical pedagogy of Freire, outlining the dialectical relationship between subjectivity and objectivity enacted in the development of critical consciousness. Carrying this dialogical argumentative forward, I go on to show how the critical geography of Lefebvre 'unpacks' this dialectic onto space and place, grounding pedagogical apprehension in a critical geography which is more directly set up to confront and engage with capitalism as a spatial force. Drawing from some of the social enterprise literature, I then utilise Lefebvre's 'spatial triad' to demonstrate how the perceived, conceived and lived facets of space can shed light on integrative areas of adult learning that together constitute a platform for a potential 'trial by space' for alternatives.

Keywords: spatial dialectics; adult education; social economy; critical pedagogy; space and place

Introduction

How might the spatial turn shed light on tensions within the social economy and in doing so, illuminate opportunities for adult learning and the forging of alternatives to capitalism?[1] Here, the spatial turn refers only to a more explicit and deliberate emphasis on geography, space, and place as avenues for critical thought. Following the conceptual import of rural studies (Cloke, 2006) and Halfacree's (2006, 2007) reading of Lefebvre's spatial dialectics into a mature rural studies literature able to 'rematerialize, resocialize and repoliticize our understandings of the coming-together of rural space' (Cloke, 2006, p. 24), this paper seeks to engage the social economy across the uneven spatiality of capitalism and within the unique spatialities of different place scales. While this paper does not necessarily retain a rural focus,[2] I seek to contribute modestly to this thrust of thinking critically about the coming-together of place, and demonstrate how Lefebvre's ideas (and the conceptual rigour and flexibility that they have maintained up until the present) may reveal themselves to be particularly illuminating—especially given our emphasis here on alternatives to capitalism, place, and the entanglement of learning and education with everyday experience.

Let us quickly introduce the notion of the social economy. To start, we can borrow from Hall et al.'s (2011) glossing. These authors write:

> The promise of the Social Economy is that it provides a set of principles, practices, relationships and organizations that will allow individuals and communities to negotiate [contemporary challenges] more successfully, to ameliorate and begin to reverse [their] worst effects, and to propose and experiment with alternative ways of regulation, organization and delivery. (p. 1)

Adding to this, Sousa and Wulff (2012) consider the social economy 'as a framework comprised of features of the public and private sectors, which is not to imply or suggest it is a hybrid of the two' (p. ii). This quick treatment does not speak to the ongoing and diverse contestations surrounding the social economy and its conceptualisation more broadly, but it does help us to formulate some related assumptions that will help us to more explicitly connect the social economy, space, and adult education. The first is that the social economy certainly has a learning dimension; negotiating contemporary challenges through the act of experimentation is itself an educational endeavour in the broadest sense. The aim of the social economy to strengthen local communities' capacities 'to respond to greater domestic and global challenges' (Sousa & Wulff, 2012, p. i) is one that is intertwined with adults who are learning to grapple with the world. The second is that the social economy seems to hover around the notion of community; the social economy 'is typically seen in the work of community-oriented organizations at the neighbourhood or city level […]' (p. i). The promise of 'alternativeness' within the social economy in many ways piggybacks on this ability and propensity within communities to "do it our own way" and is an invitation for the notions of place-building and social economy to take each other up. However, there is also the recognition (within the Canadian context) that 'robust social economy entities and formations exist at regional, provincial, and national levels as well' (Sousa & Wulff, 2012, p. i); social economy actors as well as their enabling actors can certainly act across space and from a distance. The third assumption is that social economy activity is not bound to the world of organisations and organisational thinking; policy makers, academics, organisational actors, entrepreneurs, customers/beneficiaries, and the environment collectively enact social economy systems.

Given these assumptions, I argue that it makes sense to conceptualise the learning dimensions of the social economy around place contexts and geographies. Such a move also allows for the abandonment of the social economy as an object of inquiry, for a more integrative 'object' that we might call the spaces of the social economy. Such a turn toward geography mirrors Muñoz's treatment of a geographical research agenda for social enterprise; Muñoz (2010) tells us that it may be fruitful to

> […] examine the two-way relationship between spatial context and social enterprise – considering the kinds of spaces that are 'created' and 'shaped' by the activities of social enterprise and, in turn, how these spaces are experienced by all those that are touched by social enterprise activity. Drawing on post-structural theory could help tease out the power relationships between social enterprises as organisational 'actors' that shape, and are shaped by the spatial context within which they operate. (p. 307)

In considering the *spaces* of the social economy—and their production—as entangled with adult learning and capacity development, Lauzon's (2013) question of 'capacity for whom, to do what?' (p. 4) is one of spatial apprehension and interrogation; capacity for whom, to enact what sort of space? In this light, the notion of learning is grounded in

'its effectiveness in bringing about social change and transformation' (p. 4), albeit an emergent change/transformation interrogated in spatial terms.

Freire (1970/2013) reminds us of the fundamentally narrative character of education. Jumping from pedagogy to space, we can draw from Soja (1989) who, drawing from Berger, tells us that 'any contemporary narrative which ignores the urgency of spatial dimension is incomplete and acquires the oversimplified character of a fable' (p. 24). Thus, this paper is part of a continued engagement with critical geography as an avenue for exploring the learning dimensions within the social economy. While the critical geography literature certainly and fruitfully has much to offer, I will approach the social economy through the lens of Henri Lefebvre's spatial dialectics. Lefebvre's spatial dialectics can perhaps usher us quickly to both an appreciation of the dialectical nature of space and place as well as an apprehension of our entanglement and engagement with it. The rest of the paper will proceed as follows. The next section will briefly explore Lefebvre's spatial project and how it intersects broadly with the notion of education. Next, in order to bring Lefebvre's spatial dialectics and spatial ontology closer to the realm of education, I will approach the notion of the dialectic as it is identified by Freire through his ontological commitment to humanisation and his critical pedagogy. Next, I will approach Lefebvre's spatial ontology and then his 'spatial triad' as a way to begin unpacking a dialectical conceptualisation of the learning dimensions of the social economy; on a broad and conceptual level, I will look at the spatial practice, the representations of space, and the everyday lives that are intertwined with social economy activity. The paper concludes with a brief discussion about what this apprehension of spatial elements might mean for our conceptualisation of adult learning in the social economy.

Lefebvre, space, and education

Following the words of Kipfer, Saberi and Wieditz (2012), Lefebvre's work certainly assumes a 'circuitous' character. Today there are multiple Lefebvres floating about and this is partly due to 'the current conditions of interpretations which are characterized by deep political uncertainties compounded by an enduring postmodern eclecticism' (Kipfer et al., 2012, p. 116). This eclecticism speaks also to Lefebvre as a foundational reading of space; writing of the vigorous and pioneering voices of postmodern geography, Soja (1989) tells us '[t]he most persistent, insistent, and consistent of these spatializing voices belonged to the French Marxist philosopher, Henri Lefebvre' (p. 16). Thus, Lefebvre most certainly plays an important role in our contemporary understandings of space and place. The overarching thesis in his aptly-titled book *The Production of Space* is that space is in fact *produced*—a view that contrasts markedly with the idea that space is simply an abstract and empty container waiting to be filled— a 'passive receptacle' (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p. 90). Like Marx, who demonstrated that the fetishism of commodities under capitalism lends itself to our inability to apprehend the social reality that lies behind these commodities, Lefebvre argued that hegemonic and abstract theories of space embodied in capitalism work to alienate and subsequently deny the 'rights to space' that belong to individuals and communities. Merrifield (1993) reminds us that Lefebvre's thesis 'effectively represents a spatialized rendition of Marx's conception of fetishism' (p. 520); if we cannot illuminate the production of space—'we fall into the trap of treating space as space "in itself", as space as such' (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p. 90). Lefebvre leads us to acknowledge that—and perhaps this is too swift a glossing—a particular society cannot exist without producing and

maintaining a space for itself (whether we are aware of this production or not). Thus, a capitalist society cannot exist without perpetuating and maintaining a space or spaces for itself, in the same way that a communist society cannot; nothing at all can escape what Lefebvre (1974/1991) calls a 'trial by space.' Thus, for the social economy, which we can assume at the outset as harbouring a latent potential to *challenge* the dominant logics of capitalism, a spatial interrogation of social economy activity might offer a rich and open lens through which to critically asses the connections between alternative spaces and the learning that helps constitute said spaces. In other words, if adult education does not effectively push the social economy to *produce* a space—a 'produced difference' in the face of dominant expression—then what sort of educational endeavour is it?

The bringing together of geography and emancipatory education is of course not a new sort of synthesis. As Springer (2012) reminds us, 'Reclus and Kropotkin demonstrated long ago that geography lends itself to emancipatory ideas' (p. 1613). The emancipatory spirit within critical geography, which has turned our attention 'to certain notions of space as a concept for discursive analysis and moreover, the ground for transformative action' (Kitchens, 2009, p. 241), retains a decidedly *educational* quality; Lefebvre's insistence on the centrality of everyday life, his opposition to the idea of politics as an elitist activity (Shields, 1999), and his hope for 'the possibility of people realising and empowering themselves as "total persons"' (Shields, 1999, p. 183) suggest that Lefebvre's spatial project shares a certain transformational ethos with contemporary radical outlooks of adult education. Radical schools of thought within adult education that seek to challenge the foundations of professionalism—an 'ism' with the tendency to conceptualise the 'incompleteness' of people in a very limiting fashion—mirror Lefebvre's demand for 'an end to the technocratic specialisation of academia and the organisation of government' (Shields, 1999, p. 141). Lauzon (1998) suggests that under the professionalism view, adult education 'is presented as apolitical and knowledge is believed to be value neutral. Education is explicitly linked to the economy and education is usually viewed in terms of job preparation or retraining' (p. 133). Lauzon (1998) contrasts this modernist view of professionalism with a more radical view of adult education which is itself a response to the challenges of the postmodern moment—'a moment that is not grounded in *a* particular political project, but a moment that attempts to acknowledge and respect various discourses through redrawing and re-presenting the boundaries of culture' (p. 133, *original emphasis*). In this light, Lefebvre's spatial project certainly has room for itself to become a vehicle for a postmodern 'redrawing' of new social realities and alternatives—by understanding the spatial 'as an issue cutting across disciplines' (Shields, 1999, p. 141) and with the potential to illuminate and short-circuit totalising discourses through an explicit focus on space and place. It is under this light that we can also begin to conceptualise adult education surrounding the social economy, not as an essential and linear 'catching up' to ideologies that have been decided and agreed upon elsewhere, but as an integrative *apprehension* of the spatial terrain on which the forging of alternatives rests.

Critical pedagogy and critical geography

Freire's (1970/2013) pedagogy places ontological primacy on the dehumanisation and humanisation of men and women—that is, Freire sees these situations as *realities*; he writes, '[w]ithin history, in concrete, objective contexts, both humanization and dehumanization are possibilities for a person as an uncompleted being conscious of

their incompletion' (Freire, 1970/2013, p. 43). However, Freire is quick to remind us that it is humanisation only that represents the people's 'ontological vocation'; to become more human, we must realise ourselves as Subjects who can act upon and transform the world. The learning process that describes this engagement is what Freire (1970/2013) refers to as *conscientização*; it is 'the deepening of the attitude of awareness characteristic of all emergence' (p. 109) and amounts to 'learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality' (Freire, 1970/2013, p. 35, editors note). It is this critical awareness—this learning—and the movement between the objective and the subjective that I would like to focus on here. For Freire, the objective and the subjective are opposites that interrelate dialectically and cannot be separated. Freire (1970/2013) writes:

> The separation of objectivity from subjectivity, the denial of the latter when analyzing reality or acting upon it, is objectivism. On the other hand, the denial of objectivity in analysis or action, resulting in a subjectivism which leads to solipsistic positions, denies action itself by denying objective reality. (p. 50)

In Freire's liberating education—or problem-posing education—individuals and groups become aware of their situation of oppression through an invoked 'dance' between the abstract and concrete elements of their world. Freire (1970/2013) tells us that in order to critically perceive one's contextual reality, especially if it is viewed at the outset as 'dense, impenetrable, and enveloping' (p. 105), it is necessary to employ a dialectical method of 'decoding' which requires a movement from the abstract to the concrete. Freire (1970/2013) continues:

> […] this requires moving from the part to the whole and then returning to the parts; this in turn requires that the Subject recognize himself in the object (the coded concrete existential situation) and recognize the object as a situation in which he finds himself, together with other Subjects. (p. 105)

Thus, the dialectical method that Freire calls for is one that exists *in reflection* within the Subject(s)—the incomplete human whose humanisation receives ontological status.

When we approach the social economy as potentially offering viable alternatives to capitalism, and when we assume that the forging of these alternatives will certainly involve an educational endeavour (whether we are talking about teacher/student relationships explicitly or, more broadly, the development of critical consciousness for social transformation in the world), the ontological status awarded to humanisation is one that is difficult to surrender. Indeed, this *should* be difficult. Alternatives to capitalism are not alternative for the sake of themselves; they are the becoming-alternative through the reflection, imagination, and action of the people. However, when we attempt to understand how these alternatives are constituted *spatially* using the critical geography of Lefebvre (which is the primary aim here), we inevitably encounter changes in language and in ontological primacy that differ slightly from that of Freire's pedagogy. This is certainly not to say that these theorists are both not committed to the underpinnings of dialectical materialism, or that one employs the dialectical method to a 'more correct' degree than the other, but rather, that their positions employ this philosophical worldview in unique ways in order to highlight differently the fluidity and incompleteness of the world. Indeed, it has been speculatively suggested that the take up of spatial thinking in educational studies has been slow because 'questions of social justice in education have tended to be the prerogative of critical pedagogic thought in

the lineage of Freire' (Bright, Manchester, & Allendyke, 2013, p. 749). Kitchens (2009) writes:

> […] like critical pedagogy, Critical Geography is concerned with working against oppressive elements in society, but the latter addresses localities with a more deliberate emphasis on the spatialization, or the "production of space" both in its positive and negative characteristics. (p. 245)

It is this 'deliberate emphasis' that speaks to how critical geographers choose to view and talk about the world. In Freire's pedagogy, the 'dance' between the abstract and the concrete as a dialectical argumentative—through reflection and dialogue—'leads to the supersedence of the abstraction *by* the critical perception of the concrete, which has already ceased to be a dense, impenetrable reality' (Freire, 1970/2013, p. 105, *original emphasis*). However, this supersedence can be articulated quite differently when the urgency of the spatial dimension is explicitly brought to the forefront.

Spatial dialectics and the social economy

Since the aim of this paper is to approach the learning dimensions of the social economy through an inward 'turn' towards *place*, it would be useful here to approach the work of Merrifield (1993), who utilises the spatial dialectic of Lefebvre to reassert 'the basic *ontological* nature of place itself' (p. 516, *original emphasis*). Merrifield (1993) argues that 'Lefebvre's maverick, non-dogmatic *spatialized* reading of Marx's materialist dialectic (a project he termed *spatiology*) offers the most fruitful route for broaching the problematic of place as well as permitting the formation of a robust politics of place' (p. 517, *original emphasis*). For Merrifield, place can be problematic at the outset if the manner in which geographers construct place as an 'object' of inquiry ignores its dialectic nature; reasserting the dialectical mode of argumentation can contribute to 'reconciling the way in which experience is lived and acted out in place, and how this relates to, and is embedded in, political and economic practices that are operative over broader spatial scales' (Merrifield, 1993, p. 517). Through the dialectical method, we can begin to recognise place not as a fusion of space and experience, which Merrifield identifies as a Cartesian view of place, but instead, as part of a larger and integrative totality; place and space are both ontologically real but 'melt' into each other. The difference, then, is that place is where basic social practices are lived out. Merrifield (1993) writes, '[a]s a moment of capitalist space, place is where everyday life is *situated*' (p. 522, *original emphasis*). It is in place where the forces and contradictions of an abstract capitalist space are ultimately expressed, but also where they can be contested, as 'place-specific ingredients and the politics of place are not innocent and passive in the formation of overall capitalist social space' (Merrifield, 1993, p. 522). Thus, the 'dense, impenetrable, and enveloping' (Freire, 1970/2013, p. 105) character of certain expressions of the capitalist system in particular places can be overcome through the supersedence of place-specific ingredients and a place politic—an apprehension that becomes central to educational endeavours within a social economy that is committed to producing *real* alternative spaces.

How then, does Lefevbre's spatial dialectics inform this apprehension of place within a totality of capitalist logic? Let us turn now to Lefebvre's spatial triad, which Merrifield (1993) describes as 'an extremely suggestive and flexible heuristic device for interpreting the mode of mediation between space and place which can shed light on the nature of place and how it, in turn, relates to the broader social whole' (p. 522). Quite

inventively, Lefebvre's spatial triad decomposes the dialectic, producing 'what might best be called a cumulative *trialectics* that is radically open to additional otherness, to a continued expansion of spatial knowledge' (Soja, 1996, p. 61, *original emphasis*); the triad explicitly spatialises dialectical reasoning, rendering the apprehension of place as a complex bringing together of diverse interpretations. Let us now turn our attention towards the three facets of space that make up Lefebvre's spatial dialectics. These facets, as introduced by Lefebvre, are *spatial practices*, *representations of space*, and *spaces of representation* (or *everyday lives*). It is important to remember that following the dialectical method, each of these facets cannot be understood in their own isolation; Halfacree (2007) reminds us that, '[i]n line with Lefebvre's irreducibly historical sensitivity, the three facets of space are seen as *intrinsically dynamic*, as are the relations between them' (p. 127, *original emphasis*). I now move on to re-introduce each facet and in the same breath begin to demonstrate how these facets can perhaps begin to shed light on the integrative spatial elements of social economy systems.

Given the diversity of organisational forms within the social economy (charities, non-profits, social enterprises, cooperatives, etc.) and the diversity of contexts, places, and spatial scales over which social economy activity is situated and practiced, the specific and grounded explorations of each facet will of course remain entirely partial and will by no means speak to the entirety of social economy activity or potential. This is perhaps an apt shortcoming; while the spatial triad should always certainly be employed in concrete situations (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) and '*embodied* with actual flesh and blood and culture, with real life relationships and events' (Merrifield, 2000, p. 175, *original emphasis*), the intent here is to encourage the conceptual import of the triad into the social economy at large and usher forth a spatial open-endedness into educational endeavours. However, in an attempt to *approach* some sort of concreteness and to help sketch these facets of space, I will draw from some of the literature surrounding social entrepreneurship and social enterprising activity more generally. These activities are appropriate for our purposes here for two reasons; first, the 'hybrid' nature of social enterprise as existing both within the market and within the realm of social purpose, speaks to a potential 'un-hinging' from the hegemonic marketisation of capitalist systems, but also its potential to be subsumed back into it—as a 'reduced' difference (Lefebvre, 1974/1991); second, there has been increased policy attention surrounding how social enterprise and social entrepreneurship should be conceived— that is, 'social enterprise is politically contested by different actors around competing discourses' (Teasdale, 2011, p. 100). These factors render social enterprise and social entrepreneurship—a particular and 'unfinished' corner of the social economy—as one appropriate vehicle for introducing and highlighting how the facets of space relate to the social economy and how educational endeavours might navigate the tensions within and between these facets.

Spatial practices

First, we have what Lefebvre calls *spatial practices*. These are the practices that 'secrete' the space of a particular society, 'facilitating both material expression and societal reproduction' (Halfacree, 2007, p. 126). These practices are inscribed routine activities; they structure daily life and bear a likeness to how we *perceive* the space around us. This perceived quality stems from our commonsensical understandings of space; there is a 'taken-for-granted' quality of daily life in sites that appear 'logically rationalised' (Shields, 1999). Spatial practices are unreflective and help 'to ensure social

continuity in a relatively cohesive fashion' (Sheilds, 1999, p. 162). Thus, spatial practices reflect the practical perception or 'spatial performance' of material/capital movements and the mobilities of people and information; spatial practices make up the quiet and banal world of velocities and directions, of liquids and solids. This facet of space 'is quite separate from and more reliable than stylistic measures, which are cultural and historico-geographically specific' (Shields, 1999, p. 162). This 'reliability' stems from an objective view of actuality; divorced from sense and meaning-making, the pathways and networks of societal reproduction emerge and are intuitively re-enforced. Drawing from Lefebvre and Harvey, Castree (2009), reminds us that 'space is materially produced by different societies in different ways'; '[t]hese forms and these scales are both the outcome and shaper of political economic processes that are general in nature' (p. 31). Thus, spatial practices are also interwoven with power relationships; in a particular place, the 'intuitiveness' of the spatial practice of capitalism is related to the degree said place is subsumed under the disciplinary pressure of capitalism as a discourse on space.

How then, could we begin to highlight the spatial practices of the social economy and social enterprise/entrepreneurship, more specifically? First, it would be useful to remind ourselves that the aim is not to approach particular place scales as bounded systems; while place certainly matters and can most certainly be our concern here, the spatial practices of the social economy are embedded in material systems that inevitably 'melt' into larger spatial scales including the global. Merrifield (1993) adds to this when he suggests that spatial practices fill an ambiguous regulatory role; spatial practices 'become the pressure point in keeping the space-place relationship together, yet apart' (p. 526). Thus, the spatial practices of the social economy in a particular place can, on the one hand, perpetuate the global space of capitalism, and on the other, be formulated 'in such a way as to confront the spatial sphere in which hegemonic forces are deployed' (Merrifield, 1993, p. 527). Second, in thinking about the spatial practices of the social economy, it would help to conceptualise activity within the sector as a performance that is not bound to the domains of social economy organisations. Certainly, there is a need to approach and recognise social economy organisations through an organisational lens—but just as important is the need to recognise the *swarm* of spatial practices that surround and constitute activity within the social economy. To compliment Lefebvre's spatial practice, we can briefly draw from de Certeau's (1980/1984) vantage point; within everyday spatial practices, '[t]he networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alternations of space […]' (p. 93). Hovering over the social economy, we can begin to ask ourselves, what is the 'text' of the social economy's spatial practice? Looking 'down' on a particular place and its intersections with space, what are the paths that are drawn and forgotten because of their everydayness?

Let us consider the 'swarm' of spatial practice that surrounds social enterprise and the services and/or products that these organisations provide to communities—services and products that are both produced and consumed across space. In a study conducted by Cooney (2011), even within a small sample of social purpose businesses there was a high degree of diversity in terms of what these enterprises were offering, including 'low-income housing, publishing, horticulture, agriculture, farming, retail, construction, pest control, light manufacturing, restaurant, food service, arts and crafts, furniture upholstery, and maintenance' (p. 190). Through content questions, we can begin to see how different practices 'inscribe' onto place differently; if a social enterprise delivers a product, where is the product manufactured and by whom? What materials go into the

production process and through what networks are these materials procured? Who ultimately consumes the product and what paths do they trace to enact this consumption? How much financial capital is moved across space to acquire said products and through what channels? Where does the product go after it is consumed? Does it become a waste product? Is it dispelled by the body? Does it offer some extended use-value? If a social enterprise delivers a service, what activities constitute the service itself and how are these activities enacted across space? Does the service offer employment to service deliverers? How far do customers travel to benefit from the service? Do they benefit from a distance? What are the tensions that emerge from these practices and how do these tensions lend themselves to sense-making experiences? If a social enterprise enacts a particular governance structure, how does this particular form of decision-making 'secrete' a spatial texture? This is of course a non-exhaustive list; the idea here is to turn our attention toward social enterprise as well as the social economy in general as a collection of practices that indeed make an imprint on (and receive an imprint from) the places and spaces they are situated in. In speaking of accountability, Connolly and Kelly (2011) write that the desire to 'do good deeds' within social enterprise 'does not mitigate an organisation's duty to be accountable or to engage with its stakeholders' (p. 234). Extending this out to the spatial practice of accountability, we might say that the activity of 'doing good deeds' is not divorced from the spatial texture that makes these 'good deeds' possible in the first place. If a social enterprise has made explicit the commitment to raise revenues through market initiatives and to re-invest these surpluses back into the community or the enterprise itself, then a 'topographical' view of the spatial practices of such an organisation should not be confined to the geographies produced by the 'point of sale' only. The question for the social economy becomes: what is the spatial texture intertwined with its production from top to bottom? Educational endeavours that support the production of truly alternative spaces within the social economy will be engaged fully with the spatial practicepractise of social economy activity.

Representations of space

Next, we have what Lefebvre refers to as *representations of space*. Within this facet, we encounter formal conceptions of space that are *conceived* and 'discursively constructed' (Merrifield, 1993, p. 523) by professionals and technocrats such as businesspeople, planners, engineers, developers, academics, and scientists. These spaces are certainly abstract, and are made up of and expressed through arcane jargon, codifications, and objectified and conceptual depictions. Merrifield (1993) reminds us that, according to Lefebvre, this space 'subsumes ideology and knowledge within its practice' (p. 523)— and often from a distance; representations of space 'might equally be thought of as discourses *on* space' (Shields, 1999, p. 161, *original emphasis*). Representations of space are not *lived*; they are directly linked to the *imposed* nature of the relations of production. Most crucially, writes Shields (1999), representations of space 'are central to forms of knowledge and claims of truth made in the social sciences, which (today) in turn ground the rational/professional power structure of the capitalist state' (p. 164).
How then, do representations of space impose themselves into the realm of the social economy? How does Lefebvre's concept of 'representations of space' lend itself to interrogating power within the social economy? A partial and introductory answer would be through policy building. Policy is a representation of space in that it guides action and behaviour and in turn defines what is appropriate; Nguyễn (2010) writes that

'[c]onventional orientations to policy and policy analysis often privilege legitimated governing bodies authorized to decipher the public good and to then formulate statements of intent and action' (p. 181). Thus, policy *conceives* of a space in a particular fashion and subsequently *represents* that space. The often top-down and prescriptive nature of knowledge legitimization through policy building is mirrored in Lefebvre's discussion of representations of space; in speaking about the city and urbanity, Lefebvre (1974/1991) writes that the intervention by representations of space in part

> […] occurs by way of construction – in other words, by way of architecture, conceived of not as the building of a particular structure, palace or monument, but rather as a project embedded in a spatial context and a texture which call for 'representations' that will not vanish into the symbolic or imaginary realms. (p. 42)

The imagery evoked here is complementary to that of thinking about policies as existing 'in silos'—structures that are raised not only for the purposes and domains they serve, but as a place holder for legitimisation—for power; if 'knowledge' is found to be different tomorrow, it will exuberate from the silo. The project of building policy as a *product*—a silo—is not meant to vanish into the symbolic or imaginary realms; it is meant to take a front seat in establishing the relations between objects, people, and the world.

It would be impossible here to paint a complete 'representational' picture of the social economy at large, as well as social entrepreneurship and social enterprise more specifically; not only do representations vary across states and regions, but the framing of the prescribed role of the social economy and subsequent organisational forms are themselves moving targets. Here, it would be beneficial to continue drawing from a broad treatment. For example, the increased acceptance of social entrepreneurship as operating from a 'hybrid' positioning between social change and economic benefit makes way for its normative positioning in a grand-narrative; drawing from Mair and Marti (2006), Dey and Steyaert (2010) tell us that social entrepreneurship 'gets portrayed not only as an economic force that, for instance, replaces public services with market or quasi-market based offerings, but also as a guardian of virtue and morality' (p. 91). Adding to this, Teasdale (2011) draws from Parkinson and Howorth (2008) who describe this grand-narrative as 'downplaying' the agency of front-line social entrepreneurs and practitioners in forging and attaching their own meanings to the work that they do. It is in this light that the grand-narrative of social entrepreneurship under neoliberalism has framed and *represented* what social entrepreneurship *is* and what it is capable of doing. Wound up with policy, the academic sphere seems to echo this representation as well; for instance, there seems to be a lack of imagination and diversity in terms of social entrepreneurship research. Dey and Steyaert (2012) presume that

> […] prevailing conceptions of social entrepreneurship are united by a problematic tendency: they harbour a kind of end-orientation and conservatism which neutralises the concept's radically transformative possibilities. That is, since they are more and more often evaluated in terms of their immediate "use value" (as defined from the perspective of ruling power), any radical enactments of the social are sacrificed to the ostensible "real-life" pressures of the day. (p. 91)

The authors go on to argue that social entrepreneurship is by no means a concept that is taken to its extreme; instead, social entrepreneurship is conceived of solely 'as an economically viable, yet largely de-politicised, blueprint for dealing with societal

problems' (Dey & Steyaert, 2012, p. 91). Thus, the enabling ability of research and the academy, as well as of policy and the state, is perhaps dampened by its procedural ability to reduce the *material* and the *lived* elements of alternativeness into a 'locked-in' prescriptive representation; '[l]ike all complex systems, the culture and structures of mainstream policy development can become set in ways that prevent social innovation and reject alternatives consciously or because of implicit assumptions embedded in policy approaches and processes' (Gismondi & Cannon, 2012, p. 61). Educational endeavours that support the production of truly alternative spaces within the social economy will engage with and confront representations, whether these representations act from within place, or across and 'on' space.

Spaces of representation & everyday lives

Finally, we have what Lefebvre calls *spaces of representation*. Here, and to avoid confusion with Lefebvre's representations of space, spaces of representation will also be called *everyday lives*. These spaces are comprised of what Halfacree (2007) describes as 'diverse and often incoherent images and symbols' (p. 126) which are associated with space as *directly lived*. This facet of space is one where the centrality of life is experienced and felt; for Merrifield (1993), everyday life is 'a practical and sensual activity acted out in place' (p. 525). Drawing from Lefebvre, Merrifield reminds us that spaces of representation are *alive*; they embrace 'the loci of passion, of action and of lived situations, and thus immediately [imply] time' (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p. 42). Thus, spaces of representation or everyday lives have the ability to *arrest* time; there are 'points of rapture within the repetition of everyday life' through which humans are able to 'let out the moments of spirit' (Shields, 1999, p. 187) and escape/subvert disciplinary pressures. Halfacree (2007) refers to everyday lives as 'appropriations by users into quotidian meanings and local knowledges' (p. 126); these quotidian or everyday meanings are a reflection of the 'authentic shards of spatiality' (Shields, 1999, p. 165) that inevitably have a central role in worldview construction and meaning-making activities.

Thus, when thinking about the *lived* spaces of social entrepreneurship and social enterprise, it becomes possible to imagine the myriad of *lived* experiences that surround such activities. To exist as a social entrepreneur or as a practitioner of social enterprise is not to exist in a world defined only by capital movements and the material expressions of services/products and their revenue streams—nor is it an existence that is confined to the domain of policy and representation—it also 'bursts forth' as an existence that is *lived* out cognitively by real people in real places and cannot be reduced to simple abstraction. Similarly, the experience of engaging with alternative spaces produced by the social economy as a customer/client/beneficiary is one that cannot be reduced to abstraction and retains a lived quality which speaks to everyday meaning-making and the forging of identities. Furthermore, when we approach the social economy at the outset as harbouring radical potential in terms of offering alternatives to capitalism, the 'authentic shards of spatiality' (Shields, 1999, p. 165) that describe how these alternatives might be *experienced* as a part of everyday life certainly take on a particular and invaluable significance. Here, the critique of transgression, as articulated by Dey and Steyaert (2012), can add to our understanding of Lefebvre's spaces of representation in terms of the social economy, as the critique of transgression 'takes people's perspectives, utterances, stories, etc. directly into account' (p. 99). Drawing from Foucault, these authors write that individuals 'might punctuate, breach,

and creatively reassemble that which is given and taken for granted, thus creating conditions that facilitate "becoming other"' (Dey & Steyaert, 2012, p. 99); this harkens to Halfacree's (2006) reading of the spatial dialectic, in which 'formal representations never completely overwhelm the experience of everyday life – although they may come close […]' (pp. 51–52). Thus, as Shields (1999) writes, spaces of representation or everyday lives as a facet of space 'forms the social imaginary' (p. 164) that influences how we think about the possible and the achievable; for social entrepreneurship, this facet of space speaks to not only the agency of practitioners to resist formal representation, but also 'to redefine the conditions under which something new can be produced' (Dey & Steyaert, 2012, p. 101). Now that we have taken a brief look at each of the facets of space, let us now turn towards a synthesis and what that synthesis might mean for adult education.

A 'trial by space' for alternatives

Following Halfacree (2007), perhaps the best way to bring together the three facets of space is Lefebvre's concept of 'trial by space' which can speak to the *spatial* process of allowing alternatives to emerge. On this notion, Lefebvre (1974/1991), writes:

> […] nothing and no one can avoid *trial by space* […] It is in space […] that each idea of 'value' acquires or loses its distinctiveness through confrontation with the other values and ideas that it encounters there […] Ideas, representations or values which do not succeed in making their mark on space, and thus generating (or producing) an appropriate morphology, will lose all pith and become mere signs, resolve themselves into abstract descriptions, or mutate into fantasies. (pp. 416–417, *original emphasis*)

Thus, if we accept that the forging of alternatives is a *spatial* endeavour, and we accept that it is indeed an endeavour with an educational quality, then the task for education within the social economy should then be to support a successful 'trial by space' for alternatives—alternatives that are constituted *spatially* by an engagement with the three facets of space we have reviewed above. As we have already seen, the facets of space should not be conceptualised in isolation from one another. This is not simply a reminder for critical geographers; an apprehension of how these facets melt into one another is essential to a critical pedagogy of place, where the separation of objective/abstract and subjective/concrete is overcome through Lefebrve's 'trialectic' method of de-coding space. This de-coding as an educational endeavour—of learning and exercising a critical consciousness—puts individuals and communities in a better position to understand and interrogate the places they live both as sites where outside forces come into play and where their struggle to confront these forces to create something new is situated.

But how could this de-coding of place enter into adult education surrounding the social economy in a meaningful and explicit way? Here, I am not pushing for a prescriptive 'curriculum' of sorts, where practitioners go through the motions of interrogating—of uncovering—the tensions within and between the facets. Instead, I invoke the term *eventful space* to help conceptualise how the learning might take place. Fendler (2013), who focuses on learning not 'as a scholastic objective subject to an assessment but as a multilocational and processural experience', asks, '[w]here, then, does learning take place? How can we discuss a space characterized by invisible learning?' (p. 787). Fendler then draws from Crang and Thrift's (2000) notion of *eventful space* as a term that allows us 'to name a terrain that encompasses the relational

activities of becoming-learner, the observation of which allows us to attend the manner in which affinity and action generate learning landscapes' (Fendler, 2013, p. 787). The imagery of the 'learning landscape' lends itself to the idea of nomadic pedagogy, which Fendler (2013) reminds us is not actually about traveling but about the 'subversive actions that defy, or at least resist, convention' (p. 787). In relation to nomadic practices, Fendler (2013) continues:

> […] the eventful space of learning becomes a space of experiential learning. As a space characterized by the potential it has to evoke change, it comes to be defined by a double movement, where learning practices are displaced (becoming mobile) and where learning itself is its own form of displacement (i.e., change in one's worldview). In this context, learners as nomadic subjects are involved in becoming-other, engaging in a relationship with their surroundings in a process of (continual) deterritorialization. (pp. 787–788)

While Fendler's treatment is focused around the education of young people, I argue that these concepts are especially useful for our purposes here as well, as they help us to position learning within the social economy as surrounding a 'named terrain'—a trial by space—where the tensions of the trial become opportunities for learning events that engage many elements, activities, and people.

Within this light, adult learning within the social economy 'hovers' around the named terrain of a trial by space for alternatives—alternatives that are etched out in place contexts. Thus, confrontations (wherever they may occur) between social economy representation/policy and any emergent forms of practice as they appear 'on the ground' are themselves opportunities for educational endeavours. An interrogation of the tensions between the everyday meanings attached to social economy activities and the banality of material and spatial practice can be an illuminating activity. Contradictions between the felt experience within place contexts and the social economy discourses that act 'on' space and from a distance can create opportunities for resolution and capacity building. The spatial triad allows adult learning within the social economy to explicitly surround the terrain of place production and a politics of place; adult learning as a collection of events is not confined to the individual but is, through a spatial ontology, intertwined with place-making or with what we might call the becoming-place. Through people, organisations, and policy-makers, places can come to recognise their own unique learning events and to create an 'alternativeness'—which is in itself a slippery concept, 'resisting definition and shifting as soon as attempts are made to tie it down' (Holloway et al., 2007, p. 5). Learning *in place*, as a context-specific endeavour that inevitably produces a dialogue with the state and their abstractions, may lead to a 'negative capability' where place-learners *teach* governments to 'let go' and adopt an enabling role; this negative capability does not describe a capacity to do wrong, but rather, a capacity to produce a new sound. Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) ask,

> How could lines of deterritorialization be assignable outside of circuits of territoriality? Where else but in wide expanses, and in major upheavals in those expanses, could a tiny rivulet of new intensity suddenly start to flow? What do you *not* have to do in order to produce a new sound? (p. 35, *emphasis mine*)

Thus, meaningful adult learning within the social economy partially comprises the deterritorialization of dominant spatial practices and representations and the forging of an alternativeness described as 'a self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation toward a culmination point or external end' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 22). It is perhaps through an engagement with a spatial ontology as well

as Lefebvre's three facets of space that the social economy can 'turn' educational endeavours towards an apprehension of the 'here and now' of the production of space.

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Endnotes

[1] Here, 'alternatives to capitalism' is read through Wright's (2016) eroding of capitalism linked with the 'taming' capacity of social democracy, as opposed to the smashing of or escaping from capitalism.
[2] This paper is in many ways a partial iteration of a larger project that aims to bring spatial dialectics in contact with conversations surrounding rural social enterprise in Ontario, Canada. Here, the focus remains entirely abstract and in the context of the broader social economy as a force of production intertwined with adult learning.

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