

Cooperative consolidation of enterprises rescued by their workers in Argentina and Uruguay

Consolidación cooperativa de empresas recuperadas por sus trabajadores en Argentina y Uruguay

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Background

The theoretical perspective of this article is plural, as it is based on a sociological approach to the subject which intends to analyze the social, political and economic factors that enable cooperative consolidation. It takes into account input provided by social and solidary economy, sociological economy and social change, as well as the anthropology of work and the production of the common.

Aims

Recovered enterprises (private enterprises that have been recovered by their workers, or "ERTs") have gained increased international recognition. Argentina and Uruguay are two countries in which these processes have developed more fully than in others after the financial crisis that struck the region in the beginning of the Century. In the interest of understanding the transformations that these companies have undergone and sustained over time, this article aims to research the positive factors that allowed them to consolidate themselves as cooperative companies.

Method & Procedures

The methodological strategy of this work is based on the singular and comparative study of two cases, one in Argentina and the other in Uruguay. To be eligible for inclusion, the ERTs in question must have reached the stage of cooperative consolidation. The studied ERTs were "Textiles Pigüé" (from Argentina) and "Molinos Santa Rosa" (from Uruguay). Work field was carried out between 2017 and 2019. The ethical guidelines of the institution that each author was affiliated with were observed. The main technique employed for this study was that of the interview. With the aim of comparing the cases, a structured interview consisting of 200 open questions of varying depth was used. Moreover, additional documents and research papers were consulted for further information.

Results & discussion

The experiences that have been studied underline the fact that ERTs should not be deemed as standalone and atomized units. Rather, they should be conceived contextually, and by understanding the specific socio-economic relations from which they are constructed and composed. Both study cases prove to have arisen from contexts in which there was a complex and encompassing framework of socio-economic and political relations that exceeded the labor collective. The interaction between actors is decisive, and it changes in relation to the nature of the conflicts themselves. "Textiles" shows a strong underlying conflict, and as a result it presents a framework upon which alliances are formed which evinces a notorious socio-political bent. Conversely, "Molinos" does not show a comparable conflict, and alliances are more socio-technical in nature. In both cases, the cooperatives become a pivotal aspect of the lives of the communities as they thrive, as the enterprises already were strongly rooted in society to begin with. As regards cooperative consolidation, several distinctions must be made. First, the enterprises involved are major enterprises. They originated in their respective

countries, and they are well-known and respected locally. The magnitude and the status of the factories should be deemed as a positive heritage, as in neither case were the workplaces dismantled or emptied. This means that the cooperatives started with enterprises that were well-known in the market, and which were already in working conditions. The local context and the relevancy of the factories can be deemed as assets, along with the solidarity and the support received by each collective, as the closure of the productive units would be regarded as a social problem for the local communities where they operate. The scale of the environment (IE, small urban centers) also signifies that personal networks are more accountable, and actions such as the recruitment of personnel and the reciprocity of suppliers benefit from higher and larger trust between workers. Second, the cases studied involve multidimensional cooperative projects in which aspects of financial management become particularly relevant. Open, democratic and collaborative cultures are articulated through cooperative projects in which it is understood that social viability depends on economic viability, and that having a corporate strategy is crucial for the cooperative to thrive. In both cases, the products and the commercial sustainability of the enterprises are causes of concern. These projects attain hegemonic character within its core, and as a result the strategies employed can be furthered in time. In third place, the commercial sustainability itself depends on the different instances of a plural economy, especially as regards the redistribution of wealth from the State and its relationship of reciprocity with other actors. State institutions represent very significant elements for the development of cooperatives, and State support is valued by the workers as it enables them to face certain obstacles while avoiding structural dependency. On the other hand, the articulation with the State reaches such a point that ERTs become experienced in operations of co-management and the implementation of public policies. Finally, since both cooperatives have access to the property of the productive unit and they become credit subjects, a certain stability is attained, and the capitalization of partnership projects is favored.

Conclusion

Based on the cases that have been studied it becomes apparent that the recovery of enterprises is a complex phenomenon. Consequently, its analysis should take into consideration the social and local aspects of each experience. The ground has been laid for a theoretical and empirical analysis of the social dimension of the phenomenon, and how the territorial aspects influence the prospects of self-management of each enterprise, in connection with the social, economic, political, cultural and scientific relations that are activated and developed by each and every process. By understanding how micro-policies of the common are conducive to the collective re-appropriation of social wealth we are provided with new clues that we can use to update the tools and approaches that we had available until now, and with the resources for building a more solidary and fairer economy, both symbolically and materially.

Keywords: Argentina, cooperative, recuperated enterprises, Uruguay

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