

Chapter 10

An Argentine Social Movement: The Bauen Hotel Case

Pablo Alberto Baisotti
University of Costa Rica, Costa Rica

ABSTRACT

This chapter will focus on the reclaimed Bauen hotel as one of the pioneering manifestations of the SSE in Argentina, as an example of the post-crisis social and solidarity movement of 2001. The evolution of the events related to its establishment will be traced, highlighting some of its particularities. It will also provide a vision of what the SSE represents in Latin America. The question that arises from the study of the Bauen hotel is: Is the solidarity economy presented in the particular case of the Bauen workers a social movement that fights against the government for its rights?

INTRODUCTION

The social and solidarity economy (SSE) has reappeared at the end of the 20th century as a response to the financial strangulation of development, to the deregulation of the economy and to the liberation of the movements of capital - three international forces which have led to mass unemployment, the closure of firms and the growing marginalization of the chronically unemployed and others who are unable to find work due to reasons such as age, lack of qualifications or professional experience or discrimination, amongst other things. It is a movement that is under constant construction and revision, emerging out of the so-called alterglobalization and anti-globalization movements whose greatest mobilisations were achieved at

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-5205-6.ch010

the World Social Forums. The SSE often plays an important role in combating unemployment and promoting social insertion and belongs to the 'third sector' of the economy, as it is made up of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Calle, 2003; Taibo, 2007; Singer, 2004, p. 200). According to a definition provided by a United Nations document, the SSE refers to the production and exchange of goods and services by a wide range of organizations and companies that pursue explicit social and/or environmental objectives. Guided by cooperative, ethical and self-managed principles and practices, among other attributes, these alternative forms of production, exchange and consumption are growing in response to social, economic and environmental crises.

This article will focus on the reclaimed Bauen hotel as one of the pioneering manifestations of the SSE in Argentina, as an example of the post-crisis social and solidarity movement of 2001. The evolution of the events related to its establishment will be traced, highlighting some of its particularities. It will also provide a vision of what the SSE represents in Latin America. The question that arises from the study of the Bauen hotel are: Is the solidarity economy presented in the particular case of the Bauen workers as a social movement that fights against the government for its rights?

LATIN AMERICAN VISION OF THE SSE

Individualism is a contemporary evil that has worsened more and more in recent years, especially in Latin America. Since the beginning of the neoliberal scheme implemented in the late 1970s, the continent has progressively reduced its capacity to respond to social demands, demonstrating an enormous deficit in welfare programmes and the existence of a large informal labour sector, due to the high degree of fragmentation of benefits and unequal access to them. The result is a widening gap between Latin American social classes as well as between countries in the North and South of the world. To face this growing problem - global? - collective action is required to generate positive socio-economic, political and cultural alternatives that promote change within the capitalist economic system itself and in which companies must accept greater social responsibilities and even seek for radical change in the prevailing economic system (Stiglitz, 2002, 2003, 2006; Rodrik & World Bank, 2006; Perdiguero, 2003; de Sousa Santos, 2004, 2008; Quijano, 2006; Sader, 2001; González Casanova, 2002, 2008; Mignolo, 2007; Holloway, 2004; Zibechi, 2007). It is unthinkable but clearly apparent that the financing of social policy rests on the financial contributions of the vulnerable groups that it fails to protect, since in part it is supported by indirect taxes. In general, it is accepted that in Latin America an intervening State, that guarantees an adequate level of benefits to the population

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