

Olga Orlić. *Anthropology of Solidarity in Croatia: Community Supported Agriculture*. Zagreb: Croatian Ethnological Society, 2019, p. 137

Book Review

The book by the author Olga Orlić both with its topic and title almost prophetically fits in the current events occurring in the challenging year 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic, in response to which restrictions of free movement have been introduced and farmers markets have been closed, prompted the consumers to focus more on the supply of “healthy”, regional and local produce and farmers to provide their products through online platforms, apps and social networks. Moreover, crises and disasters have shown the weaknesses of the existing system, as well as that they are unsustainable and the need for considering the creation of new, alternative economic systems.

The book is the result of the author’s involvement in research of community supported agriculture and solidarity economy since 2013. In the introduction, the author speaks about her interest in this topic and the start of her own scientific research. After that, four ensuing chapters take us through the history of solidarity economy and the practicing of solidarity both in Croatia and throughout the world. The chapter entitled *The Subject of Research* provides explanations of the basic notions: solidarity economy, community supported agriculture and groups of solidarity exchange. Community supported agriculture is one of alternative movements within the citizen engagement in the system of agriculture and food production and in Croatia it is also known under the name groups of solidarity exchange. It is a form of community of practice focused on the creation of alternative methods of supply, hence encouraging organic and/or local agriculture and solidarity behavioural patterns in society. The crux of this initiative comprises of a group of consumers that systematically supports most frequently organic and local farmers. As opposed to conventional agriculture and food system, this is the case of direct partnership between consumers and organic food producers. Systematic nature of support manifests itself in group members regularly and directly purchasing seasonal produce from one or several producers without the participation of a paid middleman. Some members of the group take and deliver the order on behalf of the entire group and hence producers and consumers meet in a pre-arranged place and make the delivery within the agreed deadline. Consumers purchase vegetables and/or other products by purchasing the previously agreed quantity of the product (the so-called market basket). Three basic principles of community supported agriculture around which a community of consumers and producers is formed are as follows: transparency, trust and solidarity.

In the ensuing sub-chapter, the author provides an overview of the development of the initiatives in individual countries: in Japan (*teikei* movement) and in Switzerland (French *Les Jardins de Cocagne*), in the US (*community supported agriculture* – CSA)

and in Italy (Italian *gruppi di acquisto solidale* – GAS; the Italian concept has been transferred to Croatia).

The third chapter Anthropological Research of Community Supported Agriculture in Croatia provides an overview and an analysis of this initiative in Croatia. Interviews with the stakeholders and members of the community and author's remarks have been included, with faithful recording of their experiences, ideas, ideals, as well as problems, fears and hopes. They are a very valuable contribution to cultural anthropology research of alternative economies. The research starts from the very inception of the Croatian groups of solidarity exchange where, through talks with the initiators of the initiatives, we collect information on how the idea that originated in Italy was transferred to Croatia and about experiences in connection with the presentation of the initiative (lectures, workshops), elaboration of the model, the launch of initiatives and the formation of the first similar groups. Besides the initiators of the initiative, the statements of farmers - pioneers who "bravely" ventured into this new and unknown method of sale of products, which was also new to them, abound in questions, initial fears, as well as delight with new consumers and their respect for organic and traditional agriculture. This chapter is special, and so are all the others, because of the description of personal experiences of gradual involvement of the author of this book into this entire supply process.

In the sub-chapter on stakeholder motivation in community supported agriculture we get the answer to the question why individuals become involved in the initiative and what their motives are. Through highlighted motives behind the stakeholders from Zagreb and Istria in community supported agriculture one can identify the wish to create both a different and a higher quality reality. For the purpose of a clearer overview, the stakeholders have been divided into three basic groups: administrators, consumers and farmers. Within each group the motivation both for becoming involved and for participation in community supported agriculture is different. Nevertheless, some clichés can be identified. In addition to existential reasons, producers are very frequently motivated by dissatisfaction with the previous work and the method of operation of employers or the wish to abandon the conventional agriculture. Involvement in organic agriculture is motivated by the wish for ecologically and ethically acceptable food production, for autonomy, for a job that is fulfilling and one that brings personal satisfaction, where there is no guilty conscience because of reconsideration or going against one's personal convictions, attitudes and values.

An analysis of personal experiences of individuals who are striving to implement the initiatives of solidarity economy shows that the reasons of consumers are primarily personal (care about their own health and the health of their family, supply of healthy food at reasonable prices) and ecological (care for the environment). Fear of bad quality food is linked with distrust in institutions. As the second main motive there is support and protection of both regional and local producers who produce food in accordance with environmental principles.

Group administrators have been confirmed as "flywheels" of the groups, initiators and organisers and actually the greatest activists. For many of them the volume of

work and activities exceed the mere administration. The two ensuing subchapters deal with the issue of their statements about their motivation, as well as implementation and practices: perception of the value created by community supported agriculture and the problems that accompany it. It is interesting to follow the attitudes about the fundamental principles: transparency, trust and solidarity and opinions about their practical implementation. Most interlocutors follow the previously mentioned values. Producers point out examples of sincerity about their problems and mistakes, as well as the loyalty and support by the consumers because of this sincerity. Mutual trust is the basis of established solid long-term relationships that can best be summarised in the quote of a producer: “I want my customers to remain my customers for as long as they eat and then I want their children and their grandchildren to be my customers.” (p. 65)

Solidarity, as the fundamental principle, implies mutual connection, interdependence, taking into account both producers and consumers. Solidarity with producers is evident in specific examples of support provided in crisis situations through, for example, prefinancing sowing, purchase of greenhouses and deep freezers or purchase of large quantities of unsold food. At the end of the day, this type of purchase restores dignity to the occupation of farmer, which in Croatia is frequently underrated and stereotyped. On the other hand, producers show their solidarity with consumers through organic farming methods and reasonable product prices. However, we are still witnessing a smaller proportion of producers showing solidarity with consumers who are faced with their crises and problems. The examples of groups in Istria has been pointed out in which solidarity with customers is shown in cases in which consumers have lost their purchasing power and they are given the opportunity to work on agricultural land and earn their market basket.

The research singled out the problems that accompany community supported agriculture. The “external” weaknesses include the fact that in Croatia organic farming is not perceived as a strategic objective and public policies do not favour small farmers. The “internal” problems appear because of disagreements and differences among individual groups, as well as among the members within the group. An uneven spread in terms of involvement among the members has been frequently pointed out, since there is a high and long-term involvement of always the same individuals and inertia and inactivity of a large proportion of customer base. Research findings here, as well as in stakeholder motivation, show motivation, enthusiasm, volunteering, inclusion, energy and altruism of individual members who launch and maintain all the initiatives.

The author notices that community supported agriculture in Croatia has been developing in two directions and the difference is evident also in the two fields included in the research: in Istria and in the North West Croatia. The groups that support organic farmers in Istria insist on certification process, i.e. they support only the organic producers, holders of certification. At the beginning of 2015, Istrian groups decided to change their name into solidarity ecological groups (SEG). Groups of solidarity exchange (GSR) in the North West Croatia, the so-called Zagreb-based groups, build their solidarity on personal trust in producers, rather than on trust in certification process. They do not believe in the system and the state, they are aware of the fact that the market niche of

organic products has been identified as lucrative and is hence being abused by many. What they have been pointing out as the advantage of groups of solidarity exchange is building trust and personal relations within the group, when customers know that they share attitudes on food with producers and when they are convinced that the food is going to be produced in accordance with these attitudes.

Groups of solidarity exchange and solidarity ecological groups in Croatia are building and strengthening local autonomy of food system at the micro level. It is an important activist movement whose objective is achievement of food sovereignty and a change of existing economic patterns. The final chapter provides a broader view of activist movements, alternative systems, policies and economies. Explanations have been given of the following concepts: food sovereignty, food safety and solidarity economy. Community supported agriculture is an important building block of food sovereignty according to which quality food is a fundamental human right and the emphasis is placed on achievement of local autonomy concerning food. In addition, community supported agriculture is a part of solidarity economy (good, alternative, green or human economy or other economy), which is one of the alternatives to capitalist system. It focuses on social capital. An overview has been provided of the history of the concept and the development of solidarity theory that transcends into a sociological, political and anthropological concept. The author provides an overview of the development of the concept, as well as an overview of different solidarity economy initiatives and practices. This form of economy represents an important attempt of transformation of the dominant economic system bottom-up, through different social innovations, accompanied by a large number of social and economic influences that are positive at the local level. In addition to being considered as the building block of food sovereignty and solidarity economy, community supported agriculture can be observed also as a form of ecotopia, a modern utopia based on solidarity and focused on creation of harmonic relationships between humans and the environment. Nevertheless, based on the presented research findings, this solidarity economy movement strives to be based on implementation of specific practices that encourage social change in small communities and hence they depart from the utopian dimension.

Through its topic, research findings and conducted analyses, this book brings optimism in gloomy times when it seems that our health, freedoms and lives are being governed. It gives insight into practices and activities that orchestrate change from the bottom up. Community supported agriculture is an activist movement that provides an alternative to production and consumption of food through solidarity: in harmony with others, in trust and bonding, voluntarily, actively and jointly sharing responsibility and providing support. Gradually through micro level, through persistent changes of daily habits, as well as through our own activity, we start changes that transform the world from economic, social and ecological aspect.

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