

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS IN THE OPERATION OF MARIBOR START-UPS AND COOPERATIVES AFTER THE ECONOMIC CRISIS IN 2008

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The economic crisis in 2008 stimulated two distinct types of economies in the post-industrial city of Maribor: start-ups and cooperatives. They were both introduced and promoted as alternatives to the industrial or service economy. In the article, I compare them to understand the features that influenced their success, continuity, and their mark on young people and society in general.

The ethnographic work was devoted to the relationship between the company/cooperative employee and his/her family, kinship and age, socialisation, the role and meaning of local social and natural environments, perceptions of work, gender relations, missions and company products, legal conditions, the content of initial business training, the types and influences of supportive institutions, the acquisition of basic funds, leisure ideas and practices, the importance of digital technologies and databases, and the share of both business spheres in the formation of urban subcultures. The article also shows the importance of focal place, education and titles, recruitment and training (incubators), business skills, funds, language, growth, and the global movement of capital for the advancement of young entrepreneurs on both sides of the conceptual comparison.

The author suggests that academic economics is the most important pillar of neoliberal ideology in Maribor and in shaping national legislation, policies, and funds. It is additionally important with its support to IT start-ups at the Venture Factory (University of Maribor). The crisis encouraged the state to support cooperatives from 2014 to 2018 with sociologists, philosophers, and anthropologists in the background. Later, when crisis was over, the state and municipality withdrew, and the community of cooperatives almost disappeared.

Keywords: *anthropology, Slovenia, social transition, policy, entrepreneurship, youth, socialisation*

SOCIAL TRANSITION TO ENTREPRENEURIALISM

The pioneers of West-European economic anthropology were mostly critical of entrepreneurship as a sign of capitalist greed. Malinowski escaped from imperial war in Europe and admired the devotion, cooperation, and respect among the natives, who were also merchants ("*native enterprise and adventure*"; Malinowski 1992). The Kula has become an anthropological role model, its distinctive paradigm (Narotzky 2007). Mauss (1966) also saw economic anthropology as opposite to Eurocentric individualisation (capitalism) or statism (socialism) and advocated a third path: trade unionism and cooperatives more reminiscent of kinship groups. A similar view was taken by economic anthropologist David Graeber (2004), a theorist of anarchism and one of the activists in the Occupy movement. Karl Polanyi (1957) and Marshall Sahlins (1972) also studied different socio-economic integration mechanisms (reciprocity, redistribution, the market). The market economy and the entrepreneur were only one of the possibilities in a wide array of subsistence practices and moralities. Entrepreneurship as a social practice was mostly left out.

In the United States and United Kingdom, interest in entrepreneurship in general and consequently in anthropology emerged in the 1980s with Reagan and Thatcher's administrations, when large companies stopped hiring, relocated production, and the small business sector was the only one creating new jobs. Thus, individual entrepreneurship marked social innovation while, at the same time, it indirectly reduced the pressure on the social budget of the post-industrial and neoliberal state (Rosa and Caulkins 2013). The rise of the entrepreneurial paradigm is thus associated with deindustrialisation and individual realisation and, in the new millennium, with digitalisation. The entrepreneur became a focus of interest as the individual who "creates change in normative orders", thus permitting anthropologists to study individual intentionality, agency, wilful goal-seeking, and strategic behaviour (Stewart 1992:73). At the turn of the millennium "everyone is an entrepreneur only when he actually 'carries out new combinations'" (Schumpeter 2021:65).¹

The economic crisis in 2008 has risen the relevance of economic anthropology

¹ Schumpeter's theory – especially the concluding application of combinatorial logic – is similar to Lévi-Strauss's description of bricolage or savage mind (2004 [1962]), a seemingly free combination of available cultural and symbolic elements (fashion, carnival, food). The Austrian economist focused primarily on the individual and changes in bourgeois society (dynamic analysis of entrepreneurship and the phenomenon of leadership), while the French anthropologist was more interested in the creation of mental or mythological categories. Combinations (Schumpeter) or bricolage (Lévi-Strauss) are preconditions for social dynamics (from structure and equilibrium to dynamics and individual agency, from language to speech).

in the sciences and society. The growing gap between dominant economic theory and economic anthropology only recently evoked a synthetic approach in the so-called “human economy” (Hann and Hart 2009; Hart et al. 2010; Rakopoulos 2014, 2017; Simonič 2019) with the historical and ethnographic comparative study of subsistence, human organisation, and morality. Anthropologists have also surveyed historical perceptions of work, technology, life in the digital world, etc. High-tech start-ups are not a subject of anthropological peer-reviewed publications, yet I could find internet sites with an anthropological focus on start-ups as tribes and changing social organisations.

Due to its (post)colonial legacy, anthropological interest was initially oriented toward studying the implementation of the entrepreneurial paradigm in peripheral and semi-peripheral communities, in “new developing nations” (Stewart 1992; Rosa et al. 2006; Turaeva 2017). It was not the emphasis on individualism, personality, or agency that was new (Benedict 1961 [1934]; Mauss 1985 [1938]; Barth 1959; Godelier 1972), but the ethnographic entry into his or her *business*, which anthropology wanted to fill with cultural contents and methods (the ‘culture of entrepreneurship’, ideology, morality, perceptions and self-realizations, ‘personality’, identity, kinship, social networks, etc.) (Barth 1963; Stewart 1992; Rosa and Caulkins 2013; Kozorog 2018a, 2019).

Given the above-mentioned changes in the organisation of labour and state at the heart of the “world system” – the USA and UK (Giraud 2006; Varoufakis 2011) – we could say that a similar process of accommodation has occurred in Eastern Europe and Maribor two decades later. Due to the collapse of mass factory production and the relocation of industries to areas with cheaper labour, the Slovenian post-socialist transition (restructuring) followed the example of the entrepreneurial transition of the USA and Western Europe, promoted through the European integration process (privatisation, competitiveness). Maribor was particularly hard hit. Under socialism, the urban economy was based on large and centralised economic systems and predominantly low-skilled labour, which mainly came from the surroundings rural areas like Pohorje, Kozjak, Slovenske gorice, Podravje, and Haloze, but also from former Yugoslav republics. With the disintegration of the Yugoslavian market, many people were left without work but also without basic knowledge about entrepreneurship or the practical functioning of the market society, which all became part of a basic literacy in skills. A major part of the social infrastructure also collapsed. Younger generations, active after 1991, were better educated in this regard, while being faced with few job opportunities and precariousness.

Maribor is currently characterised by large daily labour migrations in the direction of Ljubljana (the capital city) or Graz (Austria; administrative centre until 1918). The creative potential of the city has also declined due to suburbanisation and permanent emigration. With the decrease of the textile, electric, and machine industries, the importance of technology and technological studies at the University of Maribor also vanished. In the

city, various micro-services increased significantly (shops, bakeries, crafts, etc.).

Maribor's socialist society had a relatively high level of social and health innovations (institutions) and a relatively low level of industrial innovation (Breže 2010). Although it was based on repetitive work in production lines (firms like Elektrokovina, Tam, Metalna, MTT, Zlatorog, Intes, etc.), it enabled the advancement of technological knowledge and the enlargement of the city in scope and population² and the establishment of many cultural institutions, schools, and the university (1974). The dismantling of large production lines was associated not only with the loss of the Yugoslav market and the relocation of industries, but also with the process of denationalisation (privatisation) of socialist social property and with the reinterpretation of values, society, and the role of an individual.

Ethnology did not study this new social role of entrepreneurship in Maribor directly. The development of urban ethnology in Maribor started late and mostly strengthened or redefined the bourgeois and worker identities and the past (Godina Golija 1986, 1992; Ferlež 2001, 2009; Simonič 2004, 2012). A study of pre-WWII industrialist Josip Hutter (Ferlež 2008) was indicative in its link between socially responsible entrepreneurship and the urban community. The monograph by sociologist Miran Lavrič and anthropologist Andrej Naterer *Mesto neizpolnjenih pričakovanj (The City of Unfulfilled Expectations; Lavrič and Naterer 2019)*, with a long list of problems and impressions from Maribor as "a dying city", may be the most illustrative of a disillusioned social context and the need to change course. The (precarious) Maribor youth in the period of 'transition',³ and especially in the years from 2008 to the present, stepped into these economic, ideological, institutional, and emotional settings.

My research did not capture the whole spectrum of employment or (small) entrepreneurship through which young people could enter society as useful and creative individuals. I focused only on the two most propulsive currents, which made Maribor special in the national frame: start-ups and cooperatives. I should mention

² In 2018, the municipality of Maribor had approximately 110,500 inhabitants and is the second largest in the country.

³ The period from approximately the end of the 1980s (the economic crisis and disintegration of Yugoslavia – SFRJ – the fall of the Berlin wall, the rise of civil society and parliamentary democracy, etc.; Bibič 1997) to the official accession of Slovenia to the European Union in 2004. The term 'transition' was broadly used in Slovenia (and other post-socialist states) to signify the process of Europeanisation, meaning the implementation of Western (European) social relations, laws, and human sense (Sampson 1996; Velikonja 2005). It is misleading because no society/state is ever static (non-historical, in equilibrium; Balandier 1997) and because Western Europe itself experienced a post-social-democratic, neoliberal shift at that time (Harvey 2005). The transition in Slovenia and (South-Eastern) Europe is therefore not a period of clear duration, unambiguous agenda, and estimation, especially in light of the internal political and economic struggles (Simonič 2009).

a third path to entrepreneurship, which leads through the Employment Service or Podravska Development Agency (RRA), where they train and promote mainly individual entrepreneurship (s.p.). I should also mention the Styrian Technology Park in Pesnica and secondary and higher education (High School of Economics, Faculty of Economics and Business, Doba). In addition, young people are employed in a variety of agencies and state companies elsewhere in Slovenia and many are unemployed and some, of course, are owners of inherited property, and so on. My interest in cooperatives, social enterprises, and start-ups is severely limited, given the diverse ways in which young people in Maribor can make a living and live their lives. The ethnographic selection serves to illustrate two indicative poles of formalised economic activities after 2008.

I will present the results of a survey among representatives of two selected socio-economic groups. I have been following the cooperatives for about ten years (Simonič 2015, 2019), while the study of young Maribor entrepreneurs is recent.⁴ The methodology was designed with the assistance of the writings of Stewart (1992), Rosa et al. (2006), and Turaeva (2017). I studied the structures and meanings of entrepreneurship in both spheres through structured internet interviews with the founders of central institutions, companies, and cooperatives (10), by participating in their public events, and by analysing their appearances in mass media and scientific writings. I paid attention to the relationships between the entrepreneurs/cooperatives, their families and the local environments, their socialisation, perceptions of work, gender relations, the mission of the company/cooperative, legal formulations, the content of business training, company products, the types and influences of supportive institutions, the acquisition of start-up funds, leisure ideas and practices, the influence of digital technologies and databases, and the importance of both business spheres on the formation of urban subcultures. With these views, I intended to answer the question of how different social institutions condition the entry, strategies, and outcomes of young people?

TOVARNA PODJEMOV (VENTURE FACTORY)

The beginning of the University Business Incubator (Venture Factory) dates to 2001. It was founded by Matej Rus (MA) and Miroslav Rebernik (PhD), lecturers at the Maribor Faculty of Economics and Business. Rus first realised that students' business plans at the faculty were mostly about hairdresser salons, shops, and travel agencies,

⁴ *Young entrepreneurs in times of uncertainty and accelerated optimism: an ethnological study of entrepreneurship and ethics of young people in modern-day Slovenia (2019–2022)*, financed by Slovenian National Research Agency (ARRS).

that students of economics were mainly service-oriented and non-technological. During his visits to some foreign universities (Stanford, Berkley), he noticed that many start-up companies are being set up by the universities as derivatives of their research. In addition, many start-ups are being set up by students of technologies, who choose business sciences at the second stage of their studies to better implement their innovations in the market. "That's when the idea came to me that this is not OK at our university." Rebernik, head of the Department of Entrepreneurship and coordinator of entrepreneurship and innovations at the University of Maribor, supported the proposal to commercialise students' intellectual property. Additional impulses to the development of this direction of entrepreneurship were the projects *Start:up Slovenia*, operating since 2007, and *Start:up Maribor*, operating since 2010, which are supported by the national entrepreneurship agency SPIRIT, mostly in the face of the global economic crisis. The local and national reputation of Maribor's economists has been strengthened since 1980 by one of the largest international conferences in the field, *Podim*, where all stakeholders of the "entrepreneurial ecosystem" gather once a year (Šarec 2018).

From the very beginning, the founders of the university incubator (Tovarna podjetij) saw the greatest added value in the knowledge of students and graduates of the Maribor Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Computer Science, and Informatics, who became the backbone of the incubator. Mechanical engineering has been in decline in the post-industrial city, so it is not surprising that one of the incubator's employees missed "hardware products" that would introduce elements of mechanical engineering and chemistry into start-ups. I have not heard of start-ups based on the business ideas of students of social or human sciences.

The list of start-ups created with the help of the university incubator (Tovarna podjetij [2021]) includes companies such as *Alstar* (integral communications), *Bionica* (telecommunications, digital signal processing and intelligent environments), *Equaleyes* ("creates web and mobile applications that stand out"), *Inova IT* (mobile applications), *Movaleyes* (information systems), *Aircam* (cable video recording), *Incepto* (interactive advertising), *Mobiliti* (information solutions and graphic design), *Tom88* (mobile application for health and well-being), *Apollo* (sound electronics), *3DMED* (medical instruments, appliances, and supplies), etc. The headquarters of many of these companies are still at the address of the Venture Factory, lately in the very centre of the city.

Given the orientation of these companies, it is understandable that their employees' (informants') role models include companies such as Apple, Microsoft, Google, etc. and icons such as Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, Elon Musk, and Dan Horowitz (2014). Informational entrepreneurship is at the same time a predominantly male world, decisively more than in cooperatives.

The university incubator offers young entrepreneurs the 'GeekHouse' (a co-working

office), multimedia classrooms, databases, financial assistance (a wide network of potential investors), support in expansion to global markets, etc. Two former participants said:

“I was very satisfied with them. They helped us a lot. We got positive encouragement, support, the first push to try.”

“Their support really brought many ground-breaking things to my business in terms of consultations, marketing advice, how to apply for funds.”

Companies created with the help of the university's business incubator usually have the legal form of a limited liability company (LLC; Slovenian: *družba z omejeno odgovornostjo – d. o. o.*), because it is more possible to attract investors compared to small and individual enterprises (ULC; Slovenian: *samostojni podjetnik – s. p.*). Matej Rus, one of the leading theorists and consultants, also active in the municipality's strategic council, stated:

We absolutely encourage everyone to have a LLC and to have a team, that is, some complementary co-founders who can support all three pillars: technological, business, and design (user experience). With a personal ULC, you also have to take full responsibility and risk, while with an LLC this is not the case....

Entrepreneurs invest most of their profits in the purchasing of new and expensive equipment, which is why there is little free capital and evident display of wealth.

Two organisations under the Ministry of the Economy and Technological Development offer national support for start-ups and entrepreneurship in general. One is the Public Agency for the Promotion of Entrepreneurship, Internationalization, Foreign Investment and Technology (SPIRIT, since 1998 under different names), which formulates national guidance policies. They awarded the Maribor Venture Factory for having the best designed training programme. The second state organisation is the Public Fund of the Republic of Slovenia for Entrepreneurship, which implements policies with various entrepreneurial tenders. Young start-up entrepreneurs also have various tenders available for increasing the competitiveness of the EU, foreign corporations, etc.

All start-up interlocutors emphasised the huge importance of moral and material support from their families through parental 'understanding' at the beginning of their business journey and the covering of the costs of living. Only a few had entrepreneurial role models at home. As an example of an entrepreneur and innovator from a kinship environment, an 'uncle' appeared in interviews, rarely a father or mother. Family does not relate to business knowledge, as their parents are usually descendants of the previous

industrial economic model, workers and employees, and rarely entrepreneurs and leaders, at least not the creative and innovative sort in the modern sense of the word (Godin 2015; Leary 2019). A representative of the Venture Factory said:

In fact, too few people think they have to work on themselves, to learn for themselves, not for an employer. As an employee, you can leave the company at any time, one month in advance. Thinking that you are fatally tied to a company and learning for the boss seems to me to be fundamentally misguided. Probably someone had to teach the kids that.

Friends are more important for their entrepreneurial path, people who encourage, advise, buy and use products or otherwise help them on their entrepreneurial path.

The Venture Factory has built an urban start-up community over the years. In addition to the incubator and seminars that take place on its premises, it organises a public event Start:up Müsli every two weeks at the nearby Kibla Multimedia Centre, where students and other mostly younger participants (in their twenties and early thirties) are introduced to successful entrepreneurs and former start-ups from all over the country.

“The community today is bigger, not just the Venture Factory. I think this is a very important part.”

“Some of these entrepreneurs had a greater affinity for community building and for returning to the community, for participating in some mentoring meetings.... In principle, they (event participants; author) are younger, although now we notice that there are also ‘older’, 40+, even some 50+ people involved. The number of mature people who already have some experience is increasing, meaning that the start-up is not the first thing in their life.”

The vocabulary of this group of entrepreneurs deserves a special digression. I will focus here on only one example.⁵ Miha Kozorog outlined the basic components of the business environment in Slovenia and noted that “the word ecosystem is regularly used in relation to networking” (through collaboration, mutuality, togetherness, and community; author) and “provides an imaginary of naturalness for cohabitation among

⁵ The whole field of this globalised and networked digital economy is heavily anglicised. Linguistic markers come directly from Anglo-American business readers and business gurus and are also transmitted by the Maribor start-up movement. Some recorded words used in their English original: ‘spin-off’, ‘start-up’, ‘mindset’, ‘unicorn’, ‘user experience’, ‘life-work balance’, ‘full stack developer’, etc. Some recorded Slovenised examples: ‘fanderji’ (investors), ‘trampit’ (exchange of obligations by default), ‘rejzati kapital’ (to raise capital), etc.

entrepreneurs” (Kozorog 2018b:267). I wish to add how this naturalness is a good example of how scientific concepts, when promoted in the business sciences, can be misinterpreted and misused. As with some critics of ‘social entrepreneurship’, who object to the neoliberal redefinition of all economies as market economies, ‘ecosystem’ is also vaguely translated. Instead of considering “*all organisms in a given area that interact with the physical environment, so that certain trophic structures, biodiversity and material cycles occur with the circulation of energy*” (Odum and Barrett 2021:8), or an integrated and interdisciplinary approach to *human-ecosystem relations* (Abel and Stepp 2003), mainstream economics and business only focus on collaborative entrepreneurial networks (Moore 1993; Močnik and Rus 2016). This is quite astonishing almost six decades after Kenneth Boulding’s text *The Economics of the Coming Spaceship Earth* (1966) in which he suggested that we should start thinking of the human world economy as an “econosphere” – a subcategory of the whole (“ecosphere”) – since economics is only interested in specific types of matter, energy, and information.

Referential tracking of the term ‘ecosystem’ in business vocabulary brought me back to James F. Moore (1993), who warned against total competition and rather suggested collaborative entrepreneurial networking. His main subject of analysis were new corporate and digital economies operating under one or two ecosystem leaders or standard setters (e.g., Ford, IBM, Microsoft, Apple, Walmart, etc.).

I suggest that a company be viewed not as a member of a single industry but as part of a business ecosystem that crosses a variety of industries. In a business ecosystem, companies coevolve capabilities around an innovation: they work cooperatively and competitively to support new products, satisfy customer needs, and eventually incorporate the next round of innovations. (Moore 1993:76).

The role of start-ups is then to integrate (sell) innovations into these schemes (computer programmes, supply chains, insurances), to be integrated as quickly and broadly as possible.⁶ I got the impression that Maribor digital start-ups are like sprouts or seedlings that can soon be transplanted to another environment where they have better conditions for growth (venture capital). Of course, harvests occur in the new environment.

In my opinion, the start-up scene lacks more sustainable and sustainability values. There is an essential lack of ambition to build a sustainable

⁶ By definition, a start-up is “a small company with a precisely defined short-term success strategy, which hopes for high earnings with the selling of their products and services” (Data 2015), a “company in the first stage of operation with high costs and limited revenue” (Grant 2021). “The term was coined in the early tech revolution in the 1970s, referring to a new breed of small companies with astonishing growth potential”; a start-up consists of more than one person (likely to recruit as

business core in the community and to contribute more to the long-term economic development in the area.

That is how the representative of the National Entrepreneurship Agency (SPIRIT) explained it. If sustainability is valued by the life-long commitment to a firm and the local community, then start-ups are certainly not a good example.

Scalability (the potential for organisational and market growth) is certainly one of the basic conditions for a start-up, as the literature and interlocutors revealed (Rus 2010). An ecosystem is thus a sign of the naturalisation of the new economy in which the rule for economic growth and evolutionary accommodation in the business network applies (respect for leaders and the selected business ecosystem: “certain trophic structures” at the business or state level) (Leary 2019:87–91). Since such a view is modernistically limited, it makes sense to rather use a theory and vocabulary of social (and virtual) networks (see Stewart 1992; Abel and Stepp 2003; Castells 2010; Rosa and Caulkins 2013; Ofem et al. 2013) in order to avoid self-determining and domesticating the discourse of this new economics.⁷

One of the most successful young Maribor start-up founders described his flow in the global ecosystem of digital start-ups and venture capital.

We were four classmates who wanted to see New York for free because it was the main prize of the Imagine Cup (Microsoft competition; author). We *had the idea to make one idea* that would be profitable and would express some positive note. We found a product for smartphones. At that time, they were still quite new, so blind people could not use them. We made an interface for the blind. We won the first prize in Slovenia, then they sent us to New York, and we also ranked very high. We met a whole bunch of people, including one who was willing to give us money to start.... We went through this whole story: first we raised some capital, made some products, went to England, and eventually we found one good strategic partner, which we have now joined.... We had good timing. All because we won one student competition, and everyone loved us. And we managed to convince one man to invest in us.

Of course, not all (digital) start-ups created with the help of the university business incubator are so successful and ambitious. Many stay at the regional or local level. On

opposed to one-person initiatives that are not likely to recruit). Start-ups cannot consist of more than 500 people, they work with technology not more than ten years old and are innovative (Hub 2021).

⁷We could also study this new digital economy as a mechanism of “surveillance capitalism” (Deiber 2020).

the list of established companies at *Tovarna podjetij*, there are many that stopped operating because their founders switched to a new project (start-up), got a job in another company, or their idea was fraudulently taken over by an investing partner, like I heard from a former start-up woman in the dental business.

Surprisingly, the young entrepreneur involved in the winning development of applications for the disabled had never heard about cooperatives. This concept has simply never been introduced to him. Other interlocutors were similarly ignorant. One of the most influential persons in the Venture Factory even categorically rejected the naivety and arrogance of cooperative members. Obviously, he had had quite bad experiences with them.

TKALKA (WEAVER)

The predominant focus on the individual, on his/her (family) business and capital, has led thinkers in some parts of the world with exposed communist or egalitarian traditions, mostly in the European and global south (cf. Todd 1985), to the conclusion that ideological or cultural priorities are somehow pragmatic, the result and effort of European, modern, Protestant, rational, adventurous, daring, accumulative traditions and subjects (see Weber 1988). According to them, different local and communitarian economic traditions should likewise be considered in modern economic legislation, for example, giving the opportunity to indigenous communities or cooperatives to operate equally (on the market) because they satisfy some economic interest, while their starting points (niches) and the role that members play are different (Babič 2018). Even more radical critique of (neo)classical economics from the 20th century rejects the whole idea of market integration and advocates a solidarity-based, consensual, participatory economy, with many branches and names (see taxonomies in Bollier 2014, Gregorčič 2018a, 2018b, and Simonič 2019).

Cooperatives across Europe have had various ideological backgrounds, e.g., religious *communitas* or class solidarity. The Slovenian cooperative movement is historically bound to peasants in the 19th century and to proletariat in the 20th century. The development of the modern social economy in Slovenia stems from the crisis and criticism of capitalism and search for alternatives. According to organisers and ideologues, the reasons for the rise of the social economy were precariousness, disorganisation, fragmentation, and individualism, which prevailed in Slovenian neoliberal society during the 'transition'. Although some have defended the cooperative and solidarity economy before, it was the crisis after 2008 that greatly increased the attractiveness of such initiatives. Slovenia did not differ from other European, especially

south-European, countries, which were particularly affected by the reduced financial flows (Simonič 2019). Employment, housing, food supply, political management, or the entire concept of the Slovenian version of neoliberalism became the subject of a comprehensive examination (Štiblar 2008; Simonič 2012; Drenovec 2013; Plut 2014; Vodopivec 2015; Vuk Godina 2015). The reasons why Maribor became the centre of Slovenian cooperatives can be found in the fact that the crisis of 2008 further disabled the recovery of the post-industrial city.

To coordinate the activities of various associations in the field of social economy and new social practices, the Association Centre for Alternative and Autonomous Production (Združenje Center alternativne in avtonomne produkcije, CAAP) was established in Maribor in autumn 2011, led by the philosopher Karolina Babič (PhD). The same year, the Slovenian Forum of Social Entrepreneurship was established in Maribor, following the principles of Bangladeshi social entrepreneur Mohammed Yunus (microcredits and microfinance). Maribor's supportive environment for participatory economics and politics also includes the Prizma Foundation, founded in 2000 (Fundacija Prizma [2021]), which is an important partner of the CAAP Association, and was recently leading the implementation of Maribor's participatory budget (2021–22). Social entrepreneurship sporadically included the collaboration of other civic bodies, the Ministry of the Economy and Technological Development, and, in the period 2016–2018, the Municipality of Maribor.

Two far-reaching and socially inclusive events made a decisive contribution to the greater institutionalisation of cooperatives in Maribor. The first was the project *European Capital of Culture* in 2012, with which Maribor tried to get on the 'European cultural map', develop service activities (tourism) more strongly, and create a new, post-industrial identity. One of the four central pillars of the half-year programme was called *Urbane brazde* (Urban Furrows). It was designed by representatives of the CAAP Association and some renowned social workers, including environmental activist Anton Komat (see Komat 2009) and sociologist Marta Gregorčič (PhD; see Gregorčič 2011). Urban furrows were intended to empower minorities, promote local food self-sufficiency, and develop the social economy, political participation, and other forms of autonomous and democratic ways of social and economic inclusion. The ecosystem played a major part in the community management (local food provisioning, cycling, face-to-face relations), it was not used to designate the interdependence and hierarchy of its social proponents.

The social or solidarity economy, social enterprises, and cooperatives have become credible and are often mentioned as options for social organisation in Maribor. Through conversations with representatives of the Maribor cooperative movement and the reading of their publications, I found that the leaders of the movement were inspired by the concepts of alternative economics in Puerto Alegre, Brazil, organisations of

non-European indigenous communities (India, South America), and in Europe mostly by the Madragon corporation (of cooperatives) in the Basque Country, some also by communitarian examples from Slovenia in the 19th and 20th centuries. It was also a kind of socialist retrotopia (Bauman 2018) of the people in their thirties and forties:

We also had some responsibility for the common, we grew up in socialism, we were no longer so young. We were responsible to the local environment, and we wanted to give something back.

Political stands are more articulated in this group of young entrepreneurs. Their active citizenship stands on Marxist and anarchist critiques of bourgeois society and economy. Yet, the social backgrounds of the interlocutors in the field of cooperatives (social entrepreneurship) did not differ significantly from the social environment of those who entered the Venture Factory. They basically differ in age and education. A woman involved in the cooperative even explained that her father and mother had been directors of large socialist companies in the vicinity of Maribor for many years, but she herself directed this “inherited entrepreneurship” into the city's social and cooperative life, and she was also successful. For her, a cooperative is a legal form for a company that provides certain financial resources and has specific business characteristics, primarily related to co-ownership and co-decision making by all the members. The narrative is interesting because it shows that there is no simple status or class continuity of legal forms (human organisations) with which young people would preferentially interfere with their environment. There might be kinship legacies and encouragements (a semi-distant entrepreneurial tradition, (non)market civil activities, etc.) but these are to be realised only in the frame of preferential state policies and their alterations.

Theoreticians of the cooperative scene in Maribor held PhDs in sociology, philosophy, and anthropology, while among the practitioners we find people with high school degrees of various profiles. As with start-ups, leaders of the cooperative movement struggled to connect theory with practical advice on business registration, accounting, marketing, group management, etc.

The second series of events in which the representatives of the solidarity economy were active and promoted was the so-called *Maribor uprising* in winter 2012–2013. Protests against a corrupt mayor became protests against a corrupt political system.⁸ Some thinkers in retrospect linked the protests to the increased creative and critical potential triggered by the *Capital of Culture* in the first half of the year. In 2013, the

⁸ Rallies in Maribor started when new speed measuring radar was erected around the city. Increased fines were intended to cover the cost of expensive public-private partnerships. The Maribor ‘uprisings’ sparked similar events in other cities and finally stopped in Ljubljana (the capital) with the resignation of Prime Minister Janez Janša.

movement brought a new, 'insurgent mayor', sociologist Andrej Fištravec (PhD), who promised to introduce more political and economic participation in the municipality (2013–2018). In addition to the idea of a participatory budget and the new and open City Assembly,⁹ this set of favourable social policies included the decision that cooperatives and social enterprises were eligible to free rent for premises owned by the municipality. CAAP, Prizma, and CityLab set up a hub for cooperatives and the social economy, named *Tkalka* (Weaver), on the premises of a former textile plant in the very city centre. The Tkalka Centre became an important focal point in the national network of alternative production and economy. On behalf of the chapter, we highlighted it precisely because, like the Venture Factory, it represented the most important integrative entry point. The space was packed with events, visitors, and members exercising "desk-sharing" and "co-working" for several years.

CAAP and Karolina Babič have been in the core of this movement since 2011. New social enterprises and cooperatives have sprung up around them. To date, the CAAP team has been involved in the start-up and development of more than sixty social enterprises, half of which were cooperatives (Združenje CAAP [2021]). Among them, there are the *Dobrina Cooperative* (local ecological food supply), the *BikeLab Cooperative* (bicycle service and environmental programmes), the *Cooperative Dame* (ecological catering), the *Peron Cooperative* (cultural production), the *Hiša Cooperative* (cultural production), and, elsewhere in Slovenia, for example, the *Cooperative Konopko* (industrial hemp; Celje), *Zadruga Soglasnik* (translations; Ljubljana), *Zadrugator* (housing; Ljubljana), and, most recently, *Vinarska zadruga Maribor* (wine cooperative), *Učna zadruga* (learning cooperative) as part of an entrepreneurship programme at the Learning Centre Ptuj, *Turistična zadruga Prlekija* (Ljutomer), etc.

Only in 2015, the Ministry of the Economy expanded the Business Companies Act (Državni zbor 2015) to include cooperatives and opened access to state development funds.¹⁰ State policy was in favour of this. According to the then Secretary of State Tadej Slapnik, left- and right-wing politics saw parallels of contemporary crisis with their communitarian responses to historical crises (Krek 1895; Kardelj 1980).¹¹ In 2016 and 2017, the National Entrepreneurship Fund announced tenders for cooperatives and other social enterprises. Co-founders of two cooperatives said:

⁹ Consisting of representatives of city districts, interest groups, etc. It was intended to supplement the official political process and to include civil society directly in decision making. Only a couple of meetings were held.

¹⁰ Especially in the context of ownership transformations to ensure the continuity of companies and corporations.

¹¹ Janez Evangelist Krek was a Catholic socialist, the first systematic promoter of Slovenian peasant (and worker) cooperatives as a response to large capital (banks, industries) in the 19th century. Edvard Kardelj was the most influential theoretician of ex-Yugoslavian workers' self-management.

“After 2014, we all rode that wave a little bit. In that financial perspective, there was a lot of talking about co-financing this type of economy. The ministry was very supportive at the time. That’s probably why we decided to try.”

“We founded the cooperative in 2016. We needed a legal form that would allow us to apply for public tenders . . . Many were establishing cooperatives at that time because you do not need founding capital.”

With the new status of ‘business companies’, cooperatives have moved to the field of official economics and have explicitly become business entities in the market society, not just ‘groups of citizens. A large part of the controversy in Maribor’s cooperative new wave is now actually devoted to the extent to which the cooperative is an association of people (society) or an association of capital (an enterprise, a company) (Babič 2018). The divisions are blurred and many times a reason for failure, as stated by a member of the *BikeLab Cooperative*:

Whoever says that a cooperative is not a business company misses the point. If you want to basically make a living from it... it’s a business.... You offer a service in the market where you compete with everyone else who offers the same service.... You can also run an LLC as a cooperative if you decide to co-work.... But it’s true that an LLC gives you the right to run the company autocratically.... We also said that we are not joining the company with our own financial risk... which is also a disadvantage, because then people are not aware of all the responsibilities. You must also have a commitment, which is more than saying “I want to” or paying a membership fee [20 euros]. I’m a little sorry that it didn’t work out financially and now I’m pushing it by myself.

Recognition of the unavoidable business dimensions of the social economy and the importance of systematic and permanent support led to the establishment of the *Sociolab* programme in 2018. It is a partnership of eleven regional institutions with the leading Prizma Foundation. They offer training programmes for the social economy with a set of mentors. A coordinator at CAAP in Maribor said:

Basically, it’s supposed to be a kind of support system like *incubators* and chambers of commerce, etc. To develop a supportive environment for the social economy. Part of the programme is an incubator for newly formed cooperatives, and part is assistance to already existing ones.

He further explained that at *Sociolab*, candidates write business plans, defend

them in front of a commission, and are then offered 130 educational and consulting hours, which they spend working with mentors called “generalist” and “specialists” (finance, marketing, skills). The first wave of cooperatives after 2012–2013 did not have such training available, but because theorists and practitioners were from the same or close generations, basic knowledge was transferred in an informal setting. However, the idea of an incubator in the Maribor social economy is new and indicative of the importance of business skills promoted through ‘incubator’ and further permanent and systematic assistance. Participants of the contemporary *Sociolab* are tourism workers, musicians, founders of housing cooperatives, caterers, plumbers, and other service providers. There are almost no technological propositions among the applications.

Another consequence of the extended legislative framework of business companies was that cooperatives were classified under social enterprises. At the same time (2016–2017), a tender was opened for all enterprises that also fulfil the social mission (social enterprises; so. p.). A member of CAAP was critical:

We realised that a whole bunch of LLCs signed up for social entrepreneurship without changing anything in their business. They changed their status to get those 20,000 euros, but then they didn't do much.

The tenders failed and the fund decided not to repeat them. This also indirectly eliminated the possibility of tender financing for cooperatives as one of the legal types of social start-ups. Social and political support to cooperatives vanished. A member of a cooperative compared his position to a start-up:

It's hard to get financially lost in a (digital; author) start-up. The joke of a start-up is that you come up with an idea that is interesting for the market and that you find someone to pre-finance your project. You insist so long as to see if an idea supported by someone will work. Even the financier takes this as a kind of risk. There is huge capital behind start-ups. In cooperatives, we are tied to the local environment, and we are alone in this. We only had enough capital to peek out of the water and then we died.

In 2018–2019, the new mayor Saša Arsenović, a successful trader and caterer, terminated the contracts on free rents for non-governmental organisations and social enterprises. Due to the withdrawal of municipality support, many moved to new, nevertheless more expensive locations, and Tkalka was closed. One of the former Tkalka coordinators said:

For us, this house was a huge effort and a big burden.... It demolished the system.... We arranged this house so that we would not go bankrupt with the cost of heating. Even though we didn't pay rent, the costs were so

high.... We went 'all-in', so to speak. And it was really nice and inspiring, and we got a lot of confirmations and we enjoyed it. It was nice when the house was filled with more than 120 people. It was really lively, happening all the time.

Today, many of the *urban* cooperatives formed after 2012 exist only on paper, and a new generation is slowly emerging with the help of *Sociolab*. The oldest of the cooperatives after the 2008 crisis, cooperative *Dobrina* (est. 2011), is doing the best, as its business model is ironically the most classical *agricultural-consumer* cooperative from the 20th century – with some basic internet supply and demand updates.¹²

CONTRADICTIONS AND SYNTHESIS

I presented two economic models in the city of Maribor from the years after the global economic crisis in 2008. Both are based on the assumptions of their ideologues that the existing society and economy (production and exchange) need an alternative, but each with their own theoretical baggage and political economy.

At the formal, legal level, the relationship between LLCs and cooperatives (social enterprises) is clear: the former generates profits in a *market*, their personal incomes are in principle 'unlimited', their responsibilities are limited, and there is no general participation in management. The latter strive to address the social, cultural, health, and environmental needs of *society*; profit-making is not their primary purpose, and each member has the right to vote; and they also rely on state subsidies, (Babič 2018). But the fact is that cooperatives, ever since the 19th century, must operate in the market society and LLCs might also address social issues. They can even become social enterprises and be put into the same legal realm as cooperatives. The moral and operational dilemma between the social construction and regulation of being an *entrepreneur or activist*, which Kozorog (2018a) observed at the individual level, reveals the same gap reproduced at the level of social institutions (the state, agencies, universities, incubators) and policies.

The relationship between the two currents or movements is deeply rooted in European consciousness. It looks like a conversation between Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* and Karl Marx's *Capital*: on the one hand, there is the committed and often

¹² "The basic purpose of the Dobrina cooperative is not to make a profit, but to develop small farms, fair trade in food, and provide opportunities for fair payment to growers and producers. At the same time, the cooperative aims to connect the countryside with the urban centre, promote and develop organic farming and the principles of sustainable local food supply, social-entrepreneurial activities in the field of food production and processing, and preserve cultural, technical, and natural heritage in agriculture." (Zadruga Dobrina [2021]).

morally shaken entrepreneur (capitalist) who contributes to the long-term welfare of the national community. On the other side is the atomised, alienated, fetishized, parliamentary, and globalised world, which must be altered by direct democracy, local provisioning, and state redistribution of wealth. At the management level, the gap between the two currents could be compared to the differences between Joseph Schumpeter's entrepreneurial theory on one side and a plethora of 'anarchist authors' or 'third way' theorists, from Owen, Proudhon, and, last but not least, even Edvard Kardelj (see Toplak 2014).

The differences between the selected groups are not only moral and ideological (cf. Rosa and Caulkins 2013:109; Piketty 2020), but materialised in infrastructural, financial, generational, and educational environment. These criteria of analysis can answer the question of why the start-up movement in Maribor looks vital after twenty years, while social and solidarity entrepreneurship has achieved only limited success and is quite insignificant after ten years.

The first group includes young entrepreneurs who are united in the Start:up Maribor community with the support of the University of Maribor. This group of young creatives is derived from ideas of individual responsibility and the necessity of business associations (ecosystems). According to their basic education, they are mainly economists and electrical and IT engineers, born and educated after 1991. This group of entrepreneurs consists of young and highly educated men. The movement or scene around the Venture Factory shows vitality and has continued to recruit young people over two decades.

The second group is represented by social and cooperative entrepreneurs and is based on the destruction or at least supplementation of the dominant economic and business model. Its practitioners had at least partial life experiences during the period of socialism; with their life experiences and contemporary socio-economic activities they also represent a link between the two political systems and, at the same time, their comparative critique. Its ideologues are mainly sociologists, philosophers, anthropologists, and political scientists. In this entrepreneurial field, most of the actors are involved in nutrition, ecology, and culture and enjoy the support of CAAP (The Centre for Alternative and Autonomous Production). This group highlights societal issues and responsibilities but has neglected business aspects, motivations in modern organisations, participative investment, etc. Over time, state and municipal financial and ideological support withdrew, and proponents switched to classical (individual) entrepreneurship or left the initiative altogether.

Both of the studied spheres involved young or younger people at the beginning of their careers (aged 20–40). In both cases, we essentially spoke about young start-ups. By Schumpeter's definition (Schumpeter 2021:65), everyone is an entrepreneur

if he/she carries out new combinations, meaning inventions and their realisation (innovation). In this sense, we can find young Maribor entrepreneurs in a very broad field of activities, which are not necessarily market oriented, e.g., different civil movements, associations and societies, research, design, advocacy, philanthropy – and cooperatives. At the level of creativity and innovation, therefore, it is difficult to blame anything on one group or another. The difference must be elsewhere.

The social background of both groups of entrepreneurs is in principle the same. In both cases, friends are more important in building business networks, while families offer existential support. The difference must be elsewhere.

Differences are more visible at the level of education and the level of theoretical and ideological criteria with which they enter the market or world of “active citizenship” (Biesta 2011). While today digital technologies have a great global stock market potential, modern *urban* cooperatives fulfil local and regional missions and are not attractive to global investors as they cannot be purchased and relocated. The theoretical and market struggle between their proponents is, in a way, also *Der Streit der Fakultäten* (Kant 1987). In short, the difference between a start-up cooperative and a start-up company is related to the education of their representatives and their goals, and consequently their location in the global economic geography and knowledge market (local-global; permanent-temporary; social-capital/technology).

Additionally, education includes mastering the “business and management skills” that were available at the Venture Factory from professional lecturers in economics starting from 2001 and which were later multiplied by various other programmes in the city, while the regional cooperative network did not set up its *incubator* (Sociolab) until 2018. Cooperative members now consider themselves enterprises and market actors and are interested in being profitable businesses (albeit with a focus on local needs, rather than as part of a global tech market).

Ideological contradictions are, to some extent, also contradictions of moral judgments about the role of the individual in society and the foundations of fair social organisation (Mattingly and Throop 2018). Representatives of both spheres in principle have no contact; they quietly distrust one another. On the other hand, many expressed convictions that they both deal with start-ups and are more alike than publicly admitted:

If cooperatives used the vocabulary of start-ups, society would accept us better, they would perceive us differently.... If I go to the mayor now and say, ‘I have a spin-off’, he will look at me quite differently than if I say, ‘I am founding a new cooperative’ (as a spin-off; author).

The difference between the studied entrepreneurial groups is therefore not only ideological, but above all ideological, as the dominant economic theory of individual

entrepreneurship and LLCs had the greatest and most permanent impact on the state and consequently on the conditions and results of both social experiments. A favourable agenda has pushed cooperatives to the margins.

Classical entrepreneurship organisations (LLCs, individual companies) have been central in the establishment of a new Slovenian economic base after 1990/1991 and have been strongly supported by pro-European policies. They were also the main subject of prominent economic theoreticians at the Faculty of Economy and Business who propose not only university, but also state programmes. And they have broad structural support (EU, state). In the 2010 volume, based on surveys among entrepreneurs and thirty-six Slovenian experts in economics, we read about the problems of entrepreneurship implementation in their respected society:

What is worrying, however, is the fact that the Slovenian population shows strong egalitarian tendencies. When asked if they think that most people would prefer to have everything at about the same level of standard, as many as 83 percent answered positively.... It is interesting to add that the two countries with which we have shared the common state Yugoslavia for seven decades are totally comparable: Serbia with 82.5 percent and Croatia with 81 percent. (Rebernik et al. 2010:9)

Besides the fact that this statement really touches on the (re)distribution of wealth rather than its production (surveyed LLCs, individual companies, or cooperatives), it clearly shows the ideological frame of dominant Slovenian and Maribor economic thinkers. The majority of included experts and national policy makers thought that enterprises are more successful in resolving social and environmental problems than NVOs and also better than the state; they also think that social responsibility is secondary and not a source of competitive advantage for new enterprises (Rebernik et al. 2010:109–110). No solidarity or social economy practitioner or expert was considered at the level of this survey or its interpretation.

Systematic encouragement from 2014 to 2018 for both 'start-up scenes' was largely the result of the socio-economic crisis after 2008. Yet, the social or solidarity economy was supported only for several years. The whole socio-economic experiment was episodic, and, in one informant's opinion, it was only used as a tool for downgrading the unemployment rate a little (with temporary public jobs). Because solidarity economies could not prove their economic scalability (growth and profitability) fast enough, the crisis was assumingly over, and the public tenders were spined, they were eventually left behind. Late state recognition of cooperatives, their inability to compete for state funds, and poor infrastructure were not in favour of Maribor cooperatives.

Frequent relocation of the gravitational point (CAAP), frequent staff fluctuations,

and systemic neglect have shaken the cooperative scene.

They were totally destroyed, which is why... we have 0.3 percent of the economy, while in Germany it is around 12 percent, 40 times more.

P.S. According to the interlocutors, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021 had a positive impact on the operations of IT companies (more costumers and projects, longer working hours), while the remaining urban cooperatives slowed down or ceased to operate.

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Uloga društvenih institucija u radu mariborskih start-up tvrtki i zadruga osnovanih nakon gospodarske krize 2008.

Peter Simonič

Gospodarska kriza 2008. godine potaknula je dva različita tipa gospodarstva u postindustrijskom Mariboru: razvojne tvrtke (*start-up-ove*) i zadruge. Obje su inicijative shvaćene i predstavljene kao alternativa industrijskom ili uslužnom gospodarstvu na lokalnoj, a potom i na nacionalnoj razini. Oba smjera pokazuju duboke korijene u društveno-ekonomskim borbama i previranjima 20. stoljeća. Etnografski rad bio je posvećen odnosu poduzetnika / zadruge i obitelji, srodstvu i generaciji, te njihovoj socijalizaciji. Zanimala me je važnost lokalnoga društvenog i prirodnog okruženja, percepcija rada i rodni odnosi. Fokus je bio na misiji i proizvodima tvrtke / zadruge, pravnim odnosima, sadržajima početne poslovne edukacije, vrstama i utjecajima potpornih institucija, nabavi dugotrajne imovine, sadržajima za slobodno vrijeme te na važnosti digitalnih tehnologija. Posebno me zanimalo izbor između ovih dviju poslovnih sfera (modela poslovanja), na formiranje urbanih supkultura i recipročni utjecaj supkultura na definiranje aktivnog građanstva. Istraživanje pokazuje važnost središnjeg prostora, obrazovanja i titula, zapošljavanja i osposobljavanja (inkubatori), poslovnih vještina, jezika i globalnog kretanja kapitala za razvoj mladih poduzetnika s obiju strana konceptualne usporedbe. Poduzetništvo je istraživano kroz strukturirane internetske intervju s osnivačima središnjih institucija, poduzeća i zadruga, sudjelovanjem u javnim događanjima, te analizom nastupa u masovnim medijima i znanstvenim radovima.

Istraživanje otkriva da su državne i općinske politike bitne za društvenu evaluaciju, podršku i opstanak različitih građanskih i ekonomskih organizacija. Državne preferencije odredile su osnovne uvjete za aktivan građanski angažman mojih sugovornika (25–45 godina). Državna potpora tvrtkama s ograničenom odgovornošću ili individualnom poduzetništvu, digitalnim tehnologijama i međunarodnom tržištu stavila je (mariborske) zadruge u drugi plan, jer nisu ispunile niti jedan zahtjev neoklasične ekonomije koja je prevladavala tijekom postsocijalističke tranzicije. Tako je nacionalno zakonodavstvo uvjetovalo važnost i dugoročan razvoj različitih vještina i licencija (ekonomija, informatika, međunarodna tržišta). Mreža obrazovne i financijske potpore bila je odgovarajuće snažna i sustavna. U međuvremenu, država je podupirala zadrugu samo u nekoliko kriznih godina, koja je u skladu s tim procvjetala, ali je ubrzo nakon povlačenja državne podrške ponovno nestala.

Ključne riječi: *antropologija, Slovenija, društvena tranzicija, državne politike, poduzetništvo, mladi, socializacija*

Vloga družbenih institucij pri delovanju zagonskih podjetij in zadrug v Mariboru po ekonomski krizi leta 2008

Peter Simonič

Gospodarska kriza leta 2008 je spodbudila dve različni vrsti gospodarstev v postindustrijskem mestu Maribor: start-upe in zadruge. Obe smeri so razumeli in predstavljali kot alternativo industrijskemu ali storitvenemu gospodarstvu na lokalni in nato na nacionalni ravni. Oba tokova kažeta globoke korenine v družbeno-ekonomskih bojih 20. stoletja. Etnografsko delo je bilo posvečeno razmerju med podjetnikom/zadruharjem in njegovo/njeno družino, sorodstvom in generacijo, njuni socializaciji. Zanimal me je pomen lokalnega družbenega in naravnega okolja, dojemanju dela, odnosi med spoloma, ipd. Spraševal sem o poslanstvu in izdelkih podjetja/zadruga, pravnih razmerjih, vsebinah začetnega poslovnega usposabljanja, vrstah in vplivih podpornih institucij, pridobivanju osnovnih sredstev, vsebinah prostega časa, pomenu digitalnih tehnologij. Posebej me je zanimal voliv obeh poslovnih sfer na oblikovanje urbanih subkultur ter povraten vpliv subkultur na opredeljevanje aktivnega državljanstva. Članek prikazuje tudi pomen osrednjega prostora, izobrazbe in nazivov, zaposlovanja in usposabljanja (inkubatorji), poslovnih veščin, jezika in globalnega gibanja kapitala za napredek mladih podjetnikov na obeh straneh konceptualne primerjave. Podjetništvo sem preučeval s strukturiranimi internetnimi intervjuji z ustanovitelji centralnih institucij, podjetij in zadrug, s sodelovanjem na njihovih javnih dogodkih ter z analizo njihovih nastopov v množičnih medijih in znanstvenih spisih.

Študija razkriva, da so državne in občinske politike bistvene za družbeno vrednotenje, podporo in preživetje različnih civilnih ali tržnih organizacij. Državne preference so določale osnovne pogoje za aktivno civilno udejstvovanje mojih sogovornikov (starost 25–45 let). Državna podpora družbam z omejeno odgovornostjo ali individualnemu podjetništvu, digitalnim tehnologijam in mednarodnemu trgu je (mariborske) zadruga postavila v drugi plan, saj niso zadostile niti eni zahtevi neoklasične ekonomije, ki je prevladala v času postsocialistične tranzicije. Državna zakonodajna ureditev je tako pogojevala pomen in dolgoročni razvoj različnih znanj in licenc (ekonomija, računalništvo, mednarodni trgi). Podporno izobraževalno in finančno omrežje je bila temu ustrezno močno in sistematično. Medtem je država zadruga podpirala le nekaj pokriznih let, ki so temu primerno zacvetele, a kmalu po umiku države znova izginile.

Družbeno ozadje ali etika ljudi na obeh straneh – novoustanovljenih podjetij in zadrug – ni ta, ki določa njihov uspeh »na trgu«. Na obeh straneh sem srečal zelo predane podjetnike - kreativne in inovativne v Schumpetrovem smislu. S favoriziranjem

samo določenih pravnih oblik podjetništva (d. o. o., s. p.) sodobna država kaže svojo ideološko selekcijo, s čimer ovira ali omejuje podjetniško miselnost, s katero poskuša zgraditi novo aktivno družbo. Ne podpira vseh iniciativ, temveč predvsem tiste z donosno razširljivostjo in globalnim dosegom. Lokalna okoljska, prehranska, bivalna, in skupnostna agenda je na polju formalnega podjetništva pravno drugotnega pomena in (ne)sistematično podhranjena. Uvršča se v sfero socialne ali korektivne dopolnitve, ne enakovrednega razvojnega modela.

Ključne besede: *antropologija, Slovenija, družbena tranzicija, državne politike, podjetništvo, mladi, socializacija*



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