

Portuguese Private Institutions for Social Solidarity in the Context of Austerity: The Network of Social Canteens¹

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For some years Portugal has lived under a serious economic and social crisis which has contributed to a significant increase in unemployment, poverty and social exclusion (Abreu et al., 2013). Concurrently, the State's intervention in matters of social policies has decreased due to the implementation of austerity measures and the imperative reduction of public expenditure stipulated in the adjustment programme agreed by the Portuguese government and the Troika (International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank and European Commission). Therefore, as a way to ease the social consequences brought about by austerity policies, the Portuguese government designed a Social Emergency Programme (SEP), which came into force in 2011. The programme, deemed by the government as a model for social innovation, has been implemented through a partnership between the State and third sector organisations (TSOs), namely, Private Institutions for Social Solidarity (IPSSs).

One of the most important measures of the SEP is the Food Emergency Programme, which includes a Solidarity Network of Social Canteens, enabling access to free meals for economically deprived families on a daily basis. Although IPSSs select the people entitled to these meals, priority is given to the elderly on low incomes, families facing unemployment or with children, people with disabilities or those struggling to get a job.

A greater part of the literature has highlighted the socially innovative nature of

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the response mechanisms offered by TSOs. On account of their greater organisational flexibility, proximity to the community, cost-effectiveness and reliable networking, these organisations help to reduce inequality and promote social inclusion. However, empirical studies show that the success of the third sector in promoting social inclusion has not always met expectations (Martinelli, 2012).

In view of the above, the purpose of this article is to find out to what extent the model of social canteens, as it is currently designed, has met its objectives, namely, the creation of a socially innovative model that addresses serious deprivation, through collective social empowerment and promotion, as set out in the SEP.

The present research uses a qualitative methodology, based on semi-structured interviews with technical directors of various IPSSs and a director of the Social Intervention Centre of a Social Security District.

In the first section of this article, the arguments mentioned in the literature regarding the potential advantages of the third sector are presented. The second section includes some of the weaknesses of TSOs in the production of goods and services. In the third section, the evolution of the role played by the third sector in Portugal in the last decades is presented. The fourth section analyses the operation model of social canteens. The conclusions drawn from this study are presented in the Final Considerations.

THE ADVANTAGES OF THE THIRD SECTOR

The theoretical discussion about the increasingly important role played by the third sector in local welfare systems is usually accompanied by a list of its potential advantages in supplying goods and social services when compared to other economic sectors, especially the State.

One of the most frequently stated arguments is proximity. TSOs are particularly suitable for identifying people's needs due to their proximity to local communities. Concurrently, their flexibility and cost-effectiveness translates into a quicker and more efficient response than that of public organisations, which are more distant and bureaucratized (Laville & Nyssens, 2000; Almeida, 2011).

Another advantage associated with TSOs is the creation of trust relationships and networks, which in their turn are linked to the actual characteristics of the goods exchanged. TSOs operate mainly in a market with highly asymmetrical informa-

tion, which can encourage opportunistic behaviours (Arrow, 1963; Hansman, 1987; Krashinsky, 1986). The majority of goods and services offered are of a relational nature, that is, their value depends on the quality of the relationship between producer and consumer (OECD, 2003). The restricted distribution of profit and a greater commitment of leaders and employees to the organisation's mission are usually stated to justify the absence of opportunistic behaviour, the creation of trust relationships, and the ensuing accumulation of social capital (Putnam, 1993, 2000). On the other hand, the sector's ability to establish partnerships between local actors (public and private) and communities has also been acknowledged (Bouchard, 2011), thus contributing to a greater social cohesion within their working area.

The democratic argument is also mentioned. TSOs can bring together producers and consumers for the coproduction of services (Bélanger & Lévesque, 1991; Pestoff, 2012), thus contributing to the empowerment of citizens and the community, and to the reduction of dependency on public funding and donations (Salamon & Anheier, 1997; Eme & Laville, 1994).

The ability to innovate is another positive element of the third sector, which is usually mentioned in the literature. TSOs can introduce new products or a new type of products, new ways of organising production, new production factors, new market relationships and new types of business (Defourny, 2001; Horn, 2003; Lévesque, 2005, 2006). Their ability to innovate is explained by a series of distinctive elements. Firstly, they are essentially labour-intensive, which makes them more flexible and able to change. Secondly, there is a greater commitment of users/consumers and/or employees to the organisation's mission, since they can intervene in the decision-making process. This ties in with the third and last element – the leaders' knowledge and expertise, be they consumers or managers specialized in identifying new forms of intervention, thanks to their own involvement in the organization.

Lastly, the delegation of roles from the State to the third sector is often presented as a form of social innovation *per se* (Martinelli, 2012), because it addresses deficits of equity and access to public goods and services, ensures greater social inclusion, and at the same time helps to cut costs of the Welfare State in times of financial constraints.

There are numerous empirical studies which prove TSOs promote social cohesion in the areas where they work, through the use of innovative processes: for instance, the recent study within the Wilco Project (Evers et al., 2014), with an empirical field which spanned twenty European cities. One of the main objectives of this study was

finding innovative models which could reduce social inequality and promote cohesion within communities, and empower citizens. The case studies presented highlight the important role played by TSOs in promoting social well-being and tackling social exclusion. However, other empirical evidence shows the opposite, as will be seen below.

LIMITS OF THE THIRD SECTOR

Although many empirical studies show that the needs of communities can be better addressed at a local level, there is also empirical evidence which suggests that the localisation of policies increases the risk of inequality and fragmentation (Andreotti, 2012; Purcell, 2006; Rodriguez Pose & Ezzcurra, 2010). Indeed, there does not appear to be an automatic link between the implementation of local welfare policies and territorial inequalities (Andreotti et al., 2012).

Purcell (2006) draws attention to the need to avoid the *local trap*, a concept of his own coinage to criticize the assumption that the local scale is inherently more democratic than other scales:

Scales are not independent entities with pre-given characteristics. Instead, they are socially constructed strategies to achieve particular ends. Therefore, any scale or scalar strategy can result in any outcome. (Purcell, 2006, p. 1921).

Purcell's position does not reject the local scale, but rather advocates the need to avoid the *local trap*. The localisation of welfare policies can contribute to greater democratization and social cohesion, but also increases inequalities. All depends on a series of factors, namely the actual characteristics of these policies, the role played by central and local government in coordinating, promoting and deploying the various actors responsible for promoting well-being and, no less importantly, the interrelationships between the organizations involved in the processes of local governance. When public powers successfully allocate resources and assist the communication between the different welfare providers, especially TSOs, policies are more likely to succeed (Andreotti et al., 2012).

Apropos the debate on the limits and deficits of TSOs' intervention in providing well-being, Martinelli (2012) also mentions the existence of a subsidiarity trap. Ac-

ording to this – and those who support it – the diversification and return of State social services to another type of actors – a social innovation per se – are inherently better.

However, the emphasis placed on the socially innovative transferral of welfare production from the State to local actors has led to the existence of social exclusion phenomena being overlooked. In fact, some empirical studies show that the liberalization, privatization and devolution which have accompanied the restructuring of the Welfare State have often led to discrepancies in the quality of – and access to – social services (Martinelli, 2012, 2013).

Some authors have claimed that the contractual relationships between the State and TSOs have distracted the third sector from its core mission, thus leading to a commodification of its activities and a loss of autonomy. Eventually, this transformation impacts on inclusive citizenship, on social cohesion levels and the development of social capital (Evans & Shields, 2000; Milbourne & Cushman, 2012). In addition to this, TSOs find themselves in a paradoxical situation of economical and financial crisis such as the one which has affected Europe. On one hand, innovative solutions are required to address increasing social difficulties; on the other hand, TSOs are faced with restrictions in public funding (EC, 2011).

There are other problems mentioned in the literature about the role played by the third sector in local welfare systems. Since governance involves the participation of many actors with different objectives and rationales (public entities, social movements, political parties, unions, TSOs, etc.), making decisions on setting objectives, priorities, time frames, and implementing policies poses serious difficulties, compounded by the asymmetrical power distribution (Bozzini & Enjolras, 2012), as well as the existence of various tensions between the actors which can lead to failures in governance (Ferreira, 2012).

In view of the problems described above, the role played by the third sector remains unclear: is it really an innovative alternative to inefficient, incapable public powers or rather an ‘alibi for a retrenching Welfare State’ (EC, 2005: 21). In fact, there is not a single answer to this question and all seems to depend on the specific nature of the policies and relationships between the role of the State and that of the third sector. For example, in Denmark, the State has delegated the production of social goods and services to TSOs, but at the same time carried on being responsible for funding, and regulating the quality of – and access to – services (Thorgaard & Vinter, 2007). In other situations, however, such as in the UK, the involvement of the third

sector is justified only by the need to reduce costs, compromising the quality of the services offered (Newman et al., 2007).

THE THIRD SECTOR IN PORTUGAL

The 1974 coup d'état, the introduction of democracy and Portugal's entry into the European Union turned a new page in Portugal's social, political and economic life. In the field of social policies, the State assumes itself as the most important producer and supporter. The edification of a Welfare State in a time when its crisis was beginning to become visible in other countries was determinant in the construction of a singular and sometimes contradictory path in the process of consolidating social policies (Santos, 1993).

At the end of the '70s, the State created the National Health Service and since then the development of the entire sector has been built on the basis of an alliance between government/private for-profits. Also, the public welfare system was more complemented by the for-profit sector than by mutuals, which partly determined its stagnation (Ferreira, 2000).

However, and in a general way, the socio-economic environment was favourable to the growth of the third sector. The number of cooperatives grew steadily and new branches appeared. The 1976 Constitution recognized its importance and in 1980 the Cooperative Code was published, transposing the constitutional normative to ordinary law. At this time, there also was a veritable boom of the associative movement in fields as diverse as the improvement of housing and working conditions, parents' associations, teaching and special needs education, support for the elderly, first and second children, and drug addiction. It is in this context that the Private Institutions for Social Solidarity (IPSSs), formerly known as Assistance Institutions, experienced an unprecedented growth.

The statute of IPSSs is granted to organizations which are constituted "without a profit motive, on private initiative, with the purpose of giving organized expression to the moral duty of solidarity and justice among individuals" (IPSSs Statute, 1979). IPSSs help children, young people and families, support social and community integration, assist the elderly and disabled, promote and safeguard health, education and vocational training, and resolve housing problems. IPSSs can take the form of social solidarity associations, mutual foundations, *misericórdias*, parish organizations and

various religious organizations.

From the first moment, the State recognized and gradually delegated a part of the Social Security System (called *ação social*) to them. Being part of the social security system, they are nowadays responsible for about 70% of *ação social*, in partnership with the State (Almeida, 2011).

IPSSs account for around 80% of non-profit associations operating in the area of social and family services. The great majority of their work involves care for the elderly (51%) and helping children and young people (37%). Of less significance are the areas of rehabilitation of the disabled (5%) and family and community (5%), while the remaining 2% are engaged in work linked to drug addiction, HIV/AIDS, respite care and mental health (Almeida, 2011).

The government's relations with IPSSs are regulated through cooperation protocols and cooperation agreements. Cooperation protocols began in 1992 and inaugurated a new period of greater stability in the relations between the State and IPSSs, achieved through 'solidarity co-responsibility of the State', the 'reinforcement of the particular nature of the institutions' and the 'recognition of (their) competence' (MESS, 1992). Usually signed every year between the government, via its representatives, and the representative unions of IPSSs, their principle objective is to set the monthly grants given by the Social Security District Centres (SSDC) to the IPSSs. However, in addition to their instrumental purpose, these protocols are also pragmatic, because they define the guidelines, methodologies and priorities of the cooperation between SSDC and IPSSs. For example, new guidelines for the existing cooperation models, new forms of cooperation, criteria for accessing national and international programmes and projects, priorities such as focusing on qualified social responses, and the allocation of fully-employed human resources for specific social responses.

Cooperation agreements are signed between SSDC and the IPSSs responsible for producing goods for and supplying services to the community. Their aim is to set the conditions, which regulate the supplying of services, for both parties. Once it is signed for the first time, a cooperation agreement forges a relationship between SSDC and IPSSs which can last for years, without a defined limit. Although cooperation agreements only last for a year, they are automatically and consecutively renewed for another year, except in rare cases of termination. The amount in monthly grants paid by SSDC, compliant with the cooperation protocols, may vary and is usually between 50% and 80% of the total cost of the social response, depending

on the type of services offered. IPSSs can also receive state aid for constructing and renovating social amenities. IPSSs' revenue is complemented by the fees paid by the beneficiaries according to their income, and donations (usually small).

In recent decades, contractual relationships between the State and IPSSs have undergone several transformations. At a legal level, financial systems and their funding criteria laid down in law have changed and some are still changing. On the other hand, the tendencies of the governance processes have intensified the economic, financial and social impact of contracts in the Portuguese economy. The transformation of the State which translates into an increasing transferral of the provision of goods and services to the third sector, the growing number of IPSSs, the evolution in funding granted by social security, and the social and demographic changes in Portugal, demanding different adjustments to the type of social responses offered, have significantly changed the importance of cooperation between TSOs and public organisms (Almeida, 2011). For example, between 2000 and 2012, expenditure on cooperation agreements incurred by SSDC grew by approximately 56% (MSESS, 2012). This is mostly explained by an increase in the number of agreements and beneficiaries, and also by the annual revision/update of public funding.

Concurrently, IPSSs have been in a better position to negotiate via their peak associations since the 1990s (Ferreira, 2005). In fact, it was thanks to one of these associations that cooperation protocols were introduced to regulate the relationship between the State and IPSSs (Almeida, 2011). Equally, their representation at various governmental levels in different areas of social policies evidences their influence in Portuguese society².

The pivotal role played by the IPSSs in socioeconomic governance cannot only be perceived as a mere delegation of the State's competences to the third sector. It is also a consequence of the interest shown by these organisations in taking charge of some areas of the socioeconomic sector (Ferreira, 2005), of which social canteens are a good example.

² Since the 1990s, IPSSs are represented on the Social and Economic Council, the Cooperation Pact for Social Solidarity, the Employment Social Market Commission, Commission for Social Integration Income, Commission for the Protection of Children and Youth, and the Consulting Committee for Social Security; IPSSs also participate in various ministerial bodies, in areas as diverse as addiction, disabilities, and immigration (Ferreira, 2005).

IPSSs IN THE SOLIDARITY NETWORK OF SOCIAL CANTEENS

The Social Emergency Programme (SEP) was created by the Portuguese government in 2011 during the current economic and financial crisis with the purpose of ‘creating a socially innovative model for addressing serious social deprivation’, ‘collective social empowerment and promotion’, ‘fighting inefficiency and reinforcing response’, ‘ensuring quality and safety’ ‘without creating more bodies and structures’ and ‘involving knowledgeable agents who are in a better position to offer solutions’ (PES, 2011). The SEP is based on five priority areas, namely families, the elderly, people with disabilities, volunteers and institutions. The creation of the solidarity network comes under the first category.

The purpose of the social canteens is to meet the nutritional needs of socioeconomically deprived individuals and families by offering them meals.

According to the regulations of social canteens regarding the selection of individuals and/or families, priority is given to elderly people on a low income, families affected by unemployment, families with members relying on care, people with disabilities, and people struggling to re-enter employment. Other situations may be considered, especially for beneficiaries of social assistance (provided that it is not food aid), recent cases of unemployment in more than one family member, families and/or individuals on low wages, chronically ill families and/or individuals on a low income, families and/or individuals with low pensions, single parents on low wages, and situations of temporary emergency. People who already go to a social canteen cannot be beneficiaries of an IPSSs, as they already receive food and/or meals provided by another social response on a regular basis, or receive food on a daily basis supplied by other organisations such as the Food Bank, and the Food Distribution programme for the Most Deprived Persons of the Community (MDP)³. Although meals are usually meant to be collected at the social canteens for home consumption, there may be cases in which IPSSs are not within easy reach of the beneficiaries, such as those living in rural areas, and meals can be delivered at home. There are also exceptional situations in which meals can be served on the canteens’ premises. The cooking and distribution of meals imply the existence of adequate, fully-operational

³ The Food Distribution programme for the Most Deprived Persons of the Community (MDP) is an annual initiative promoted by the European Commission. It follows a plan for allocating resources to Member-States for the supply and distribution of food in favour of those in need within the European Union. The Food Bank is a solution offered by the IPSSs which aims to prevent food waste by giving it to the needy.

facilities which can be used for other social responses that the IPSSs may develop in the future. The aim of the social canteens is to supply a minimum of one meal a day, every day of the week. When the PES was created meals were limited to 65 per day, for each IPSSs. This number was recently increased to 100. According to the regulation of social canteens, SSDC, in conjunction with the decentralised structures of the entities representing IPSSs, are responsible for prioritising the geographical areas and subcontracting each institution for supplying meals. The amount paid by SSDC to IPSSs is €2.50, and the meals are free for beneficiaries, but a maximum of €1 per meal may be charged, depending on their financial capacity, as ascertained by the IPSSs.

SOCIAL CANTEENS: SOCIAL INNOVATION OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION?

According to the Social Security Institute, over 14 million meals (more precisely, 14 450 100) were served in 811 social canteens across the country between January and October 2013.

Three immediate issues arise from these data. Firstly, these numbers attest to the impact of the economic and financial crisis, as well as austerity measures on a country of ten million people, all the more so because intervention coverage is clearly insufficient. Secondly, the supply of free (or affordable) meals seems to be unsurprisingly justified by the existence of serious deprivation in many strata of Portuguese society. Thirdly, considering some of the aforementioned organisational dynamics of TSOs and the way the model of social canteens is designed, IPSSs appear to be the most suitable structures for supplying those meals. Indeed, by being more flexible closer to the communities they can sometimes find innovative solutions to better adapt social intervention to local needs. For example, some IPSSs have encountered difficulties in delivering meals in inland regions due to the geographical dispersion of the population. Some organisations, therefore, subcontract other IPSSs closer to the beneficiaries' area of residence which will then supply the meals as per usual. The meals are then paid for by the IPSSs which signed the protocol with SSDC (CNIS, 2012)

Despite these considerations, there are other questions which demand clarification: has the current model of social canteens served its purpose? Is it a socially innovative model that addresses serious deprivation, through collective social empowerment and promotion, as set out in the SEP?

As part of this research, the technical directors of some IPSSs and the director of social intervention at the Centre of Portuguese Social Security, who coordinates the social canteens, were interviewed with a view to answering these questions.

One immediate conclusion drawn from the interviews was that the interviewees unanimously agreed on the passive, i.e. non-inclusive, nature of the model of social canteens. In other words, social canteens have not empowered nor helped individuals to become autonomous. By acting in isolation, without any social follow-up, they generate situations of dependency, as outlined by a social security officer:

I am against social canteens. It is an expensive solution, because at €2.50 per meal, a family of four costs €300 a month. If we look at what this family can do, it certainly could do more than eating. [...]. I think we're achieving what was initially undesirable – not teaching people to fish but giving them the fish, making them dependent. People go to social canteens because their incomes are not enough to buy a decent meal. But when that happens, the problem isn't just economic. The way social canteens work means that these problems are not addressed.

This opinion is corroborated by the IPSSs technical directors who said that a significant part of the people and families benefiting from the support of social canteens are already known by social services. Some have been receiving Social Integration Income (SII) for several years and have not been able to escape from the cycle of poverty. Instead of acting as a lever of social support, social canteens have, therefore, helped to make poverty more chronic, since beneficiaries receive no support – such as that developed by IPSSs – to help them achieve autonomy. In addition, SEP was originally intended to terminate in June 2014. However, as of this moment (mid-2016) the programme is still ongoing, and the government has yet to set a definite deadline. In fact, all interviewees expressed their concern regarding the uncertain future of the social canteens, as well as their insufficient outreach.

In addition to the waiting lists in some IPSSs, which were also identified in a study carried out by CNIS (2012)⁴, the interviewees also mentioned that the support given by the Food Bank and MDP, which cannot be provided to families who go to social canteens, is clearly insufficient. Furthermore, according to the regulations of social canteens, organisations are only obliged to supply one meal, which only par-

⁴ According to this study, there were waiting lists in all districts but six (CNIS, 2012).

tially meets families' nutritional needs⁵. This means that by restricting the number of meals (one hundred meals per day), organisations are limiting an already insufficient supply of food. Usually, the most sought-after organisations are those operating at the limit of their capacity, thus contributing to an increase in waiting lists.

All interviewees mentioned that very often canteens 'do not help those who need them the most', both due to lack of awareness ensuing from poor publicity in the community, and the recent phenomenon of new poverty, as well as the 'shame of poverty' hitting the middle classes, caused by unemployment and debt. Lastly, the delivery of food to deprived families was hindered by difficult access to inland areas. IPSSs endeavoured to address this problem by outsourcing food delivery to institutions closer to the beneficiaries. However, two issues are raised: on one hand, there are numerous areas and villages in Portugal where no organisations were set up and based, which means that local deprived families and individuals cannot be reached; on the other hand, even in remote areas where IPSSs are based, the outsourcing of food delivery may not always happen.

Tense relationships between institutions and governance problems are added difficulties for social canteens. One of the problems mentioned by the interviewees lies precisely in this outsourcing. Using an example given by one of the interviewees, an IPSS signed a protocol with a SSDC for serving 80 meals. Only 50 meals are being served and, given the difficulty in reaching a remote area where 20 beneficiaries live, the IPSS decided to outsource to another IPSS for an additional 20 meals, thus leaving an extra 10 to deliver. However, demand may increase and more people may go to both IPSSs, for instance, ten people each who need food. Since the IPSS only has 10 meals to spare, 10 people will be excluded. In these situations, the decision on which IPSS will be responsible for serving the meals and which IPSS will be excluded has ignited some conflict between these institutions.

There is competition among IPSSs to attract beneficiaries, which can manifest itself in different ways, such as the definition of catchment areas. This process is carried out by the SSDC as follows: firstly, the IPSSs are selected according to their capacity for supplying meals; then, the catchment areas are chosen by the SSDC in coordination with the IPSSs. Sometimes, when home support service (HSS)⁶ is

5 Interviewees reported that there were IPSSs that chose to slightly increase the amount of food being served at lunch, so that leftovers could be served at dinner.

6 The Home Support Service is a type of social response whereby individual personal care is delivered to persons and families who, due to a physical condition, disability or any other impediment, cannot meet their own basic needs and/or perform daily activities, on a temporary or permanent basis.

already being delivered by IPSSs in collaboration with the SSDC, managers try to negotiate catchment areas between the HSS and the social canteens with a view to reinforcing their economic sustainability, which has led to conflicts of interest and governance problems.

The predominance of purely economic decisions in the sector has, in fact, hindered the quality of the services delivered by the IPSSs. Despite the fact that the SSDC funds each meal at €2.50, there are occasions when institutions try to achieve some financial gain and the quality of services thus deteriorates:

There's a bit of everything. There are institutions which – I am certain – do it because they are obliged to and they already do it with other social responses. The(ir) chief concern is to serve those who need their services [...] and the €2.50 may not be enough because some have bought equipment specifically for that purpose [...] and they did what take-aways do. They bought food packaging and very often they change the normal route of the HSS [...]. Now, there are several others who don't do this and profit from social canteens [...] and some don't even operate 7 days a week. This is the Social Security's fault. (Director of the Social Intervention Centre of a Social Security District).

In fact, as explained by the interviewee, Social Security officers, who monitor the way canteens are operated, choose to ignore this situation and do not even exercise any supervision, despite knowing that some canteens are perhaps being mismanaged. And given that in some places there are no local organisations who could supply meals instead, the possible closure of a social canteen would deprive the people in need from having these meals. Therefore, 'it is better to turn a blind eye than to close a canteen' (Director of the Social Intervention Centre of a Social Security District).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Although having been presented as a social innovation, SEP, which includes the solidarity network of social canteens, must not be perceived as such. According to the concept developed by several authors (Moulaert et al., 2010, 2013; Martinelli, 2012) and implemented in European projects (EC, 2005), a social innovation is defined by

the following three criteria: i) meeting the needs of people and communities who otherwise would be ignored; ii) the empowerment of individuals and groups; and iii) a transformation of social relations. The first requirement has only been partially met. Outreach is hindered by the existence of waiting lists, the fact that only one meal is supplied in most cases and the significant number of people who are excluded due to lack of awareness, 'shame of poverty' and the absence of social canteens in some inland areas of Portugal. The second requirement has not been met. Because of their passive nature, social canteens neither promote the empowerment nor autonomisation of individuals, and instead encourage dependence. The third requirement has not been met for the same reasons. The supply of meals to deprived families is an isolated measure, which is to say, it is not followed by any type of change-inducing social intervention in situations of persistent poverty, for example, the development of social inclusion projects. Social relations, therefore, do not change. In short, social intervention has been followed by situations of social exclusion.

The analysis of the participation of IPSSs in the solidarity network, while highlighting their potential advantages compared to other socioeconomic mechanisms, such as the state and the market, also unveils some of their weaknesses. Firstly, their proximity to the local community – an unquestionable advantage of TSOs, which are particularly suitable for identifying people's needs – is limited. Indeed, some geographical areas are still unable to benefit from the work of these organisations. In these cases, the argument of policy location can be a 'trap', using Purcell's expression. Secondly, outsourcing, to which IPSSs sometimes resort so that they can extend the social canteens' outreach, proves their ability to innovate, but at the same time shows their governance problems triggered by conflicts of interest.

Lastly, tension between solidarity logic and economic logic is obvious in the strategies developed by IPSSs. While there are situations in which solidarity is the main motivation in the way IPSSs operate, thus improving social well-being, in other cases strategies of economic survival seem to supersede the interests of deprived individuals and groups.

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