This project aims to discuss the main features of the current labor crisis, emphasizing the diffusion of new forms of precariousness, such as self-employment, no contract or fixed-term contracts, that are used to lower labor costs. This project also seeks to analyze the contradictory use of associative labor arrangements. On one hand, these arrangements are used to lower costs and diminish labor rights; on the other hand, they are used as an employment and income alternative based on principles of self-reliance. This project seeks to analyze the ways in which these new labor configurations, called Solidarity Economics, are a viable alternative for employment and income generation. The gender issues involved will be examined in a transversal way in all of the occupational arrangements examined.
SUMMARY OF RESULTS
TO DATE AND PERSPECTIVES

The findings may be classified along three thematic axes.

1) Informality and precarization. We identified the stability of traditional informality and the emergence of a new informality as a result of the processes of productive restructuring, outsourcing and subcontracting. The old informality persists in the form of peddlers in the downtown sectors of large cities, in household employment, in self-employment, in home-based work in the shoe and clothing industries and in other forms of underemployment. Since the 1980s, however, a new informality has emerged that is related to specialized and educated workers, especially women, who are either excluded from formal employment or have never had formal employment, with new or reshaped activities through their insertion in productive chains, subcontracting, and the diversification of products and forms of peddling.

2) Solidary economy. We found that a large part of the cooperative experiences promoted by both governmental policies and civil organizations result in precarious insertion. Although employment in these cooperatives tends to ease workers’ poverty and extreme vulnerability, the lack of continuous training and of minimal capital for autonomous survival in the market create significant difficulties for the cooperatives, especially with respect to their practices of self-management and solidarity. Consequently, these experiences do not always result in the improvement of life conditions and of social and political insertion for those involved. Nevertheless, most of the experiences of a solidary economy must be seen as a result of labor resistance vis-à-vis unemployment and/or more precarious forms of subsistence.

3) Subcontracting and cooperatives. We observed an increase in subcontracting through cooperatives that organize manpower, whether through frauds aimed at a reduction of costs for contracting firms or through cooperatives organized and supported by NGOs and unions committed to strategies of self-management and democratization at work. Problems of inspection and various court interpretations of a true cooperative raise difficulties for these labor experiences because labor courts tend to distrust them. Other issues, such as the lack of capital, technological obsolescence, and problems with the market, make cooperatives partially dependent on subcontracting. However, even when workers control the productive process and own the means of production, subcontracting hampers a cooperative’s autonomy, maintains its subordination in the market, and may jeopardize the entire project of self-management.

MAIN PUBLICATIONS


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