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BERNHARD LEUBOLT, WAGNER DE MELO ROMÃO
**Socio-Ecological Innovation in Brazil: The Collective Survival
Strategy of the Collectors of Recyclable Material**

ABSTRACT This article deals with the social inclusion of hitherto marginalised people by means of social innovation. Theoretically guided by Fraser’s ‘3-R-approach’ to promoting social justice, social inclusion is understood as a multi-dimensional process, involving redistribution, recognition, and representation. Empirically, the focus is on the Brazilian social movement of collectors of recyclable material. This historically marginalised group of people was able to constitute a nation-wide social movement. Based on this achievement, further social and political inclusion has been promoted since 2003. The article describes the process as ‘bottom-linked’, in the sense that a middle way between ‘top-down’ solutions by the state and ‘bottom-up’ processes by civil society has been found.

KEYWORDS Social innovation, social justice, social inclusion, collectors of recyclable material, Brazil

I. Introduction

This contribution will deal with the Brazilian movement of collectors of recyclable material and its inclusion into the multi-level governance framework throughout the 2000s. The process will be analysed within a framework of social innovation, understood as a process of civil society actors participating in providing institutional solutions to promote social justice.

The promotion of social justice will be analysed, guided by Nancy Fraser’s ‘3 R’ approach. Her holistic framework of social justice can help

to further elaborate the multidimensionality of poverty and specify how local forms of social innovation can help to overcome poverty and social exclusion. Fraser distinguishes three dimensions of social justice: (1) redistribution concerns the economic dimensions of inequality and exclusion; (2) recognition concerns social justice's cultural dimensions; and (3) representation concerns its political dimension. The latter dimensions have also been emphasised by Spivak (1988), who stressed the inability of the subaltern (or marginalised) to 'speak' – i.e. their inability to participate politically due to a lack of cultural recognition and political representation.

This article is based on research for the projects ImPRovE and SUSY², involving an analysis of recent Brazilian literature on the movement of collectors of recyclable material, document analysis of the Brazilian legislation on solid waste, and interviews with members of the political community in the sectors of waste recycling and the social and solidarity economy. In addition, field visits to cooperatives and training centres in the sector of waste recycling were carried out.

Based on this framework, the emergence and proliferation of the Brazilian movement of collectors of recyclable material will be analysed, initiated by a short introduction to the Brazilian context. The emergence of the social and solidarity economy (SSE) will be highlighted as an important feature regarding the development of the collectors' movement. The latter will be explored regarding its contribution to social justice and its growing embeddedness into governance settings which can be described as 'bottom-linked'. The final sections will deal with challenges and contradictions, while concluding that the case of the collectors of recyclable material is promising.

2. Context

Brazil is the 5th largest country worldwide, both in terms of inhabitants – the last census in 2010 reported 190.7 million inhabitants (IBGE 2013; data for 2009) – and in surface area – its 8.5 million square kilometres amount to nearly double the size of the EU 28 member states' 4.4 million square kilometres. It has ranked among the most unequal countries worldwide for many years, but recently reported a considerable decline in its

Gini coefficient, from 0.596 in 2001 to 0.53 in 2012, while the poverty rate dropped from 35.09 per cent to 15.03 per cent during the same period (cf. Leubolt 2015).

The Brazilian welfare regime has been characterised – along with other Latin American examples – as a historically ‘conservative-informal’ regime (Barrientos 2004; cf. also: Soares 2001). The institutions of the welfare state were comparable to corporatist or conservative European welfare regimes, but the institutional consequences were different, due to important differences in the labour market (Behring/Boschetti 2008). The latter regime is characterised by a large informal sector, comprising of workers without formal contracts. Therefore, the employment-centered social security model produces more social exclusion than in the European cases of corporatist/conservative welfare regimes. The Brazilian welfare regime has been transformed since the 1980s in various and partly contradictory directions: the 1980s were marked by democratisation after a long lasting military dictatorship (from 1964 to 1985). The social movements emerging during the period of democratisation strongly pressed for social and democratic reforms, acting as an important trigger for both institutional social policy reforms and socially innovative practices, which were further incentivised during the 1990s (Dagnino 1994). The latter decade has been characterised as ambiguous, as neoliberal reforms led to a deterioration of the labour market, negatively affecting standards of living, while socially innovative initiatives promoted participatory reforms and poverty reduction (Dagnino 2002a). The 2000s can be seen as a period of consolidation of socially innovative initiatives and the search for solutions to the problems created during the neoliberal period in the 1990s (Leubolt 2013; Abers et al. 2014; Romão 2014).

3. The Social and Solidarity Economy in Brazil

Based on prior research (e.g. JEP 2009), the emergence and proliferation of the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) can be seen as one of Brazil’s most important socially innovative initiatives regarding labour market policies. It has been promoted since the end of the 1980s to organise informal workers. Reacting to the crisis of unemployment and employ-

ment conditions, workers began to organise themselves in cooperatives. A broad variety of initiatives from different ideological backgrounds, ranging from philanthropic and religious to socialist or anarchist inspired initiatives, began to create socially innovative labour market experiments.

The guiding principle of the Brazilian solidarity-based economy has been the collective self-organisation of workers with the explicit requirement of democratic decision making. All involved workers have an equal vote in the decision-making process and it was envisaged that salaries would be less stratified than in conventional capitalist enterprises. The main difference of solidarity-based enterprises, compared to their conventional counterparts, is that they are owned by their workers. Therefore, the differentiation between workers and owners ceases to exist, as the workers collectively own their company (Singer 2002).

Despite the mixed success² of these experiments with regard to the improvement of working conditions (Leite 2009), they have been largely seen as innovative solutions to deal with the problem of unemployment (Singer/Souza 2000). Rising rates of unemployment and informality in the 1990s were an important trigger for efforts to tackle the respective problems. During the 1990s, the most important expression of the SSE in Brazil was the occurrence of factories being taken over by the workers (*empresas recuperadas*), reflecting the centrality of the fight against unemployment. During the 2000s, these factories began to disappear (Interviews with Sanchez 2015; Singer 2015).³ Despite the importance of these experiences in the fight against unemployment, many of the factories were not practically organised according to the principles of SSE. Recent empirical findings (Leite et al. 2015) suggest that in many cases, workers' rights were not applied, while, at the same time, democratic decision making and egalitarian wage structures were lacking. Consequently, these practices contributed to the precarisation and deterioration of labour conditions.

During the 2000s, the factories taken over by the workers therefore gave way to a broader spectrum of different expressions of SSE. While during the 1990s the centre of attention was production, this changed during the 2000s: The SSE moved closer to environmental movements and the concepts of *Buen Vivir* and *Vivir Bien*, promoted by the indigenous movements and the governments of Bolivia and Ecuador (interview with Sanchez 2015). From 2004 onwards, the Brazilian government

started to collect data. The mapping carried out by the sub-ministry for SSE (cf. Gaiger et al. 2014) reported a total of 33,518 SSE enterprises in Brazil between the years 2004 and 2013 (SENAES 2013). This number is believed to be considerably lower than the exact number of enterprises, as some of the small enterprises might not have been registered (ibid.). There are different forms of organisation of these enterprises: 8.8 per cent are organised as cooperatives, 30.5 per cent as informal groups, and 60 per cent as associations (ibid.). The majority of SSE enterprises (40.8 per cent) is situated in Brazil's poorest region, the northeast. In Brazil, 54.8 per cent of SSE enterprises are situated in rural regions, 34.8 per cent in cities, and 10.4 per cent in mixed regions (ibid.). The majority of Brazilian SSE enterprises (47 per cent) are operating in the sector of familial agriculture, 14 per cent are beneficiaries of agrarian reform, 12 per cent are working in the handicraft sector, six per cent consist of other autonomous workers, five per cent are collectors of recyclable material, three per cent are cooperatives of people with advanced educational backgrounds, and three per cent are fishermen (SENAES 2014). In a nutshell, the most important field for SSE was familial agriculture in the countryside, where the majority of SSE initiatives are situated. As Sanchez stated in the interview, the collectors of recyclable material became the most important expression of SSE in the Brazilian cities during the 2000s.

The SSE mainly concerns people considered as poor. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that the mapping process revealed lack of income as the central problem of the Brazilian SSE sector (as stated by 74 per cent of the respondents of the government's questionnaire, cf. SENAES 2013). Despite this fact, it has also been recognised (Santos 2002) that collective organisation in SSE initiatives contributed to better possibilities to generate income. Nevertheless, the lack of capital (in a thorough sense, including social, cultural and financial capital; cf. Bourdieu 1984) is an important obstacle for many SSE initiatives. Therefore, many initiatives have been developed in close cooperation with NGOs and (from the 1990s onwards) the public sector. In Brazil, this movement has been described as the proliferation and institutionalisation of 'citizenship' (Dagnino 2002b), understood in a broad sense as the promotion of social justice with the participation of the hitherto excluded. Many efforts were started during the 1990s, despite a 'perverse confluence' (Dagnino 2002a: 288) with

neoliberal reforms, which limited the improvement in material circumstances of the poor. The most important political party to implement such efforts has been the Workers' Party (PT). During the 1990s, this mainly concerned local governments (Bittar 1992; Magalhães et al. 2002). Considering the SSE sectors, local policies included the provision of adequate space for work, or subsidies. An important landmark regarding government support was the election of Lula as national president in 2002. As early as 2003, the first year of his government, a new sub-ministry of solidarity-based economy (Secretaria Nacional de Economia Soliária – SENAES) was created. Headed by the renowned intellectual Paul Singer, SENAES always worked with a rather small budget. Therefore its efforts were mostly in the area of coordinating government action, related to legal obstacles, such as the availability of credit. An important exception was made for the collectors of recyclable material, who began to be more and more actively involved in policy making and who became one of the most important target groups for the efforts of poverty reduction.

4. Collectors of recyclable material and the Social and Solidarity Economy

The collectors of recyclable material can historically be seen as a particularly disadvantaged and excluded group of workers: since the 1950s, there have been reports of men, women and children surviving in and through waste. The group of people involved in waste collecting grew particularly during the 'lost decade' of economic growth in the 1980s and the neoliberal decade of the 1990s. Formal jobs were lost and people had to find work in the informal sector. While the composition of waste changed to include a rising percentage of recyclable material, recycling was also facilitated by the growing numbers of temporarily unemployed people desperately looking for employment opportunities (Bosi 2008; Wirth 2013), who were willing to accept to work with trash under precarious and unpleasant conditions (Medeiros/Macêdo 2006; Couto 2010). From the 1990s onwards, awareness of the need to recycle waste has grown, especially after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro. In the aftermath of the conference, public opinion in Brazil

also recognised the need to promote social and environmental sustainability. As a result, groups such as the collectors have begun to be viewed more positively.

The number of people employed in the sector of collecting recyclable materials consistently grew to reach 387,910 workers in 2010 (IPEA 2013: 8). In 2010, 31.1 per cent of the collectors were female and 66.1 per cent belonged to the socially disadvantaged group of 'black people' (port.: *pretos e pardos*). 20.5 per cent of the Brazilian collectors were illiterate (*ibid.*), which is clearly above the National average (1.51 per cent in 2011). The collectors are therefore clearly an educationally disadvantaged group, which is also reflected in income terms. The average income of the collectors was 571.56 Brazilian real (approx. 250 Euro), slightly higher than the minimum wage (510 Brazilian real in 2010) and less than half of Brazil's average wage. Besides the comparably low income, working conditions are also considered to be dangerous, as dealing with waste can also be hazardous to the collectors themselves (Castilhos Jr. et al 2013), especially if they are not equipped with sufficient security clothing. Therefore, efforts to improve material wellbeing have to consider wage levels, work equipment and labour conditions.

The extreme form of social exclusion in Brazil has negative impacts on issues related to dignity and 'recognition' (Fraser 1995). In the case of the collectors, the problem is further aggravated by the working conditions, as dealing with waste is regarded as a particularly unsavoury and dirty activity (Couto 2010). Social justice issues of 'recognition' therefore have to tackle a two-fold process of improving societal views of the collectors while also further promoting self-respect among the workers to promote social inclusion and the improvement of dignity. 'Representation' (Fraser 1995) of the collectors was also rather limited until the end of the 1990s, thereby creating a pattern of political exclusion. Thus, the promotion of social justice for this particularly vulnerable and excluded group had to tackle many obstacles. The formation and proliferation of a social movement proved to be vital in this regard.

The movement of collectors of recyclable material began to be formed at the end of the 1980s. Philanthropic entities linked to the Catholic Church were campaigning for social programmes for people living on the streets who were suffering most from hardships induced by the economic crises

of the 1980s and 1990s. The philanthropic organisations soon began to incentivise the poor to begin to organise themselves to struggle for a more decent standard of living and to obtain social rights. The first cooperative of collectors of recyclable material – COOPAMARE – was founded in 1989 in São Paulo. Soon, other comparable initiatives were founded, such as the first association of collectors of paper and cardboards (ASMARE) in 1990 in Belo Horizonte. The growth of the movement further profited from UN efforts to promote international environmental conferences, such as the Rio conference in 1992, which emphasised the social dimension of sustainability (Gonçalves 2006). In 1998, UNICEF incentivised the first national encounter of the collectors as part of a campaign against child labour associated with garbage. These efforts gave birth to the ‘National Forum of Waste and Citizenship’ (Fórum Nacional de Lixo e Cidadania), which can be seen as a vital institutional step towards the collective organisation of the collectors (Grimberg 2007: 15).

One year later, in 1999, the ‘First National Encounter of Paper Collectors’ (I Encontro Nacional dos Catadores de Papel) took place in Belo Horizonte. There, the participants decided to realise the ‘First National Congress of Collectors of Recyclable Material’ (I Congresso Nacional dos Catadores de Materiais Reciclável) in 2001 in Brazil’s capital city, Brasília. At this congress, the participants decided to found the ‘National Movement of Collectors of Recyclable Material’ (Movimento Nacional dos Catadores de Material Reciclável – MNCR; cf. MNCR 2009: 10). Thus, the foundation of the movement occurred at a moment when many participatory institutions had already been established in Brazil (Wirth 2013). The constitution of the national movement can be seen as strongly interlinked with the rise of popular social movements in Brazil during democratisation, and their consolidation and inclusion into policy making during the 1990s. Compared to other social movements, the formation of a movement of collectors of recyclable material occurred considerably later, and it has developed in close linkage to supportive governments. The first cooperative, Coopamare, was founded in São Paulo, when the city was governed by a mayor of the Workers’ Party (PT), who was supportive of the collectors – particularly by providing a space to work in a middle class district (which generated a considerably large volume of waste and thus, also, of recyclable material). As it has always been more difficult for marginalised

people to organise, the efforts of local governments and NGOs have been seen as vital by the interviewed experts and involved agents. Besides the provision of space, other efforts involved financial aid to buy machinery (e.g. waste press, garbage collection trucks), as well as financial grants for collectors who join registered cooperatives.

The MNCR acts as an organisation of diffuse representation of the workers of waste recycling, working on the ‘lower end’ of the value chain, i.e. people and organisations working in sectors of (a) collecting recyclable materials and (b) organizing materials to be able to sell them in bulk. The latter activity is important, as it secures better payment for the collectors who otherwise have much less bargaining power. Additionally, it is easier to search for alternative purchasers, if price pressure is exercised on the collectors. Important in the activities of the MNCR is its self-recognition as representing a particular group of workers (MNCR 2009, 2013), instead of being simply a representative body of the poor.

The MNCR is not formally entitled to represent all the associations and cooperatives. Nevertheless, due to the links with the grassroots organisations, the MNCR legitimately claims the representation of the organised sectors of collectors, which adhere to basic principles of the solidarity-based economy of (a) self management and direct democracy; (b) direct popular action by the collectors themselves; (c) ‘class independence’ from political parties, “dominant classes, governments and the rich” (MNCR 2015); while (d) practising ‘mutual support’ both among collectors and a broader variety of social movements and trade unions in Brazil and internationally which share the objectives of the MNCR – namely to struggle for decent conditions of “work, education, health, nutrition, transport and leisure” (MNCR 2015). The principles of the MNCR require all members to be organised collectively and to adhere to workplace democracy. Another important issue is education, which the MNCR organises by itself, guided by the educational principles of Paulo Freire (1968). Therefore, professional and political education are necessarily linked. This “integral instruction” (MNCR 2013: 113) is reflected in the efforts of the MNCR in promoting on-the-job education for the collectors (‘from collector to collector’), emphasising the material benefits of collective organisation and decision making being intertwined with individual and collective empowerment (MNCR 2009, 2013).

5. The MNCR and its contribution to social justice

The creation of the MNCR has been directly associated with the promotion of SSE for the collectors of recyclable material. By adhering to the principles of SSE, the collectors were able to promote social justice in a thorough sense, involving ‘redistribution’, ‘recognition’ and ‘representation’ (Fraser 1995).

‘Redistribution’ has been promoted by egalitarian income structures within the member cooperatives of MNCR. Furthermore, selling recyclable material in bulk secures higher revenues. Thereby, collective organisation contributes to improving income levels for a particularly vulnerable group. This is further aided by better options for using machinery, such as waging machines, garbage presses or trucks (for further details, please consult Leubolt/Romão 2016). Additionally, the very process of engagement in paid work for hitherto excluded people promotes ‘recognition’. As Elizabeth Grimberg reported in the interview⁴, recognition has been further expanded by formalising labour. The very use of uniforms and professional working spaces in cooperatives helps to get rid of the image of delinquency, often associated with informally working collectors of recyclable material. As confirmed in the literature (Mayer 2005; Pereira 2011), the emergence and proliferation of cooperatives has positively contributed to the recognition of the collectors as workers and citizens.

Furthermore, the collectors of recyclable materials are engaged in a vital activity to improve socio-ecological wellbeing among the population, as the question of how to deal with garbage is not only connected with sustainability but also with sanitary and health issues. Therefore, the reduction of waste through recycling benefits society. Throughout the 2000s, Brazilian public opinion gradually shifted towards recognising this special benefit, as promoted by the collectors of recyclable material (interview Grimberg). Important for this process was the political inclusion of the collectors – leading to ‘representation’ in Fraser’s terms. The latter process will be highlighted in the following section.

6. The governance of Brazilian waste collection and social innovation as a 'bottom-linked' process

Given the very marginal position of collectors of recyclable material in Brazilian society, their capacities for political action were severely limited. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that the first efforts towards their social inclusion were made by NGOs and faith-based philanthropic organisations, and from the 1990s onwards deepened by progressive local governments and university centres. In the field of social assistance they have been engaged in the training and mobilisation of the poor to enable them to work in the sector and to organise collectively. They assisted the collectors' organisations both commercially and in their dealings with legal matters.

People who participate in cooperatives and associations need a basic level of training and adaptation to regular work to be able to collaborate in collectively self-managed entities. Significant sections of the most excluded sectors of society are – at least initially – not able to meet the requirements. Apart from knowledge of professional procedures and of prices for different recyclable materials, this also concerns problems related to drug addiction, which is an important factor behind people having to live on the streets. These people need social assistance, as they would otherwise not be able to survive in the market. In order to start the process of social inclusion, there are centres – co-financed by the local state and charitable entities – to prepare the most vulnerable to be able to take part in cooperatives and associations.⁵

The intermediary actors were also important in the initial steps of the political organisation and articulation of the collectors' movements. This was conducive to the MNCR in constituting itself as a social movement as a first step to campaigning for its inclusion in public policy making.

While the first steps were taken on the municipal level, recent steps have significantly involved the national level. The up-scaling of political decision-making processes has resulted in positive results for the MNCR in municipal and regional institutions. The 'upscaling of demands' by the MNCR was facilitated by the national government under president Lula (from 2003 onwards), who gave a lot of attention to the social inclusion of the collectors. As early as 2003, they were included in the national programme to eradicate hunger (Programa Fome Zero). In the same year,

the national government also created an inter-ministerial committee for the social inclusion of collectors (CIISC). This committee was coordinated by the General Secretariat of the Presidency and included representatives of the Ministries of Social Development, of Work and Employment, of the Environment, and of Cities, as well as the most important state-owned companies (the National Economic and Social Development Bank (BNDES), the public banks Caixa Econômica Federal and Banco do Brasil, and the semi-public oil company Petrobrás). Besides the government actors, the MNCR was also represented in the committee (CIISC 2013).

These efforts reached a peak at the end of the 2000s, when the national government decided to promote nation-wide participation on the question of waste management. The MNCR was the most important participant in all three levels of governance (municipal, regional and national), being highly active in constructing a new National Policy of Solid Waste (Política Nacional de Resíduos Sólidos – PNRS), as the national coordinator of the Fourth National Conference for the Environment, Ana Carla de Almeida, stated in an interview⁶. The law arising out of the participatory process in 2010 did not only include the collectors in its drafting, but also considered the collectors in the execution of policies. The PNRS was incentivised by a national law (no. 12,305, Aug. 2nd 2010) and deals with the principles, objectives, instruments and directives of integrated waste management, including the responsibilities of waste creators and public entities. It is a national law affecting private and public entities on national, regional and municipal levels. In relation to the collectors, the PNRS follows the objective of the “integration of collectors of reusable and recyclable materials in the actions involving shared responsibility for the life-cycle of products” (article 7, item XII) and explicitly includes the “incentive for creation and development of cooperatives or other forms of association of collectors of reusable and recyclable materials” (article 8, item IV) among the political instruments. Shortly afterwards, the CIISC also set up a new programme to better benefit the collectors. In 2010, the programme Pró-Catador was put in place to further promote the interests of the collectors. As with the drafting of the PNRS, the people represented by the MNCR were not only beneficiaries of the programme, but the MNCR also actively participated in its drafting (CIISC 2013).

The national law was the starting point of a participatory political process to put the abstract law into a concrete action framework with aims and targets for the involved private and public actors on federal, regional and municipal levels. This process has been gradually realised, leading to the Fourth National Conference on the Environment in 2013. The conference was organised as a multi-level participatory process with municipal and regional conferences preparing for the national conference. To secure the participation of relevant actors in the process, quotas for participation were set up: 50 per cent of participants came from civil society, 20 per cent were representatives of business, and 30 per cent came from the public sector. The MNCR was the most important collective actor, mobilising vast numbers of collectors to participate in the process of policy making. This did not concern only national policies, but also the other levels of governance, such as the municipalities, where Integrated Plans of Solid Waste Management (Planos de Gestão Integrada de Resíduos Sólidos – PGIRS) were drafted.

Analytically, the processes described above can be understood as an important part of a transformation of state – civil society relations in Brazil. Instead of the dichotomy between ‘bottom-up’ and ‘top-down’ solutions, a new approach was developed. Within the confines of the research project ImPRovE, we described this as a ‘bottom-linked’ approach (Oosterlynck et al. 2013): Instead of bottom-up processes, led and primarily executed by civil society, bottom-linked processes stress the necessity of public institutions and intermediaries for fostering innovation. Given the special difficulties of marginalised people, there is a need for external guidance. Nevertheless, guidance does not necessarily imply full control by the state or intermediaries, as top-down solutions would suggest.

7. Social innovation, contradictions and challenges

The MNCR represents an interesting example of multi-scalar social innovation. Collective organisation has systematically linked political mobilisation to the improvement of the living conditions of a particularly vulnerable and excluded section of the population. Thus, Westley and Antadze’s (2010) finding that social innovations should go beyond mere

market-based solutions has been confirmed. As indicated by Mumford (2002), a chain of interdependent social innovations led to the results described in the previous sections.

Despite many factors being linked to the specific Brazilian institutional framework and political landscape, important lessons for mainstreaming social innovation can be drawn. The first step of social innovation occurred locally, when the collectors began to organise collectively and founded the first cooperative in São Paulo in 1989. During the 1990s they were able to consolidate and expand their actions, which was important for forming a national movement at the beginning of the 2000s. From 2003 onwards, political commitment was sustained and an interministerial committee was formed on the national level. Despite implementation difficulties, the most outstanding result of the political inclusion of the collectors was the final approval of the National Policy of Solid Waste (PNRS), in large part due to the intensive participation of members of the MNCR

Despite the material improvements, the focus of the MNCR has always gone beyond monetary issues. Issues of the collectors' recognition as a group of workers, engaged in the socio-ecological wellbeing of society were always strong, as the long-standing leading personality of the MNCR, Eduardo de Paula⁷, reported in the interview. This focus has also been institutionalised – in the form of organising the cooperatives and associations, as well as the regional and national organisations of the collectors, and in the internal organisation of education processes, which are mainly organised within the cooperatives, and include consciousness-building to promote self respect and solidarity within and beyond the collectors of recyclable material (MNCR 2013). Thereby, individual and collective forms of empowerment are intertwined.

Additionally, the actions of the MNCR have been carried out in a rights-oriented perspective, claiming the right to the city and beyond. This was fostered by the constant lobbying (via fora including other civil society actors and/or via demonstrations) to take part in the political decision-making process. The presence of activists of the MNCR was vital in political settings involving the media, as the long-standing scientist and activist Elisabeth Grimberg reported in the interview. Consequently, the collectors were better able to convince the public that they deserved public support – much more effectively than professional advocacy groups would have been

able to. By exercising publicly visible pressure for social, cultural and political inclusion, the MNCR succeeded in being included in this comprehensive sense. Thus, lobbying in the wider public sphere is important in order to improve the process and empowerment dimensions of social innovation. Policy actors can thereby be pressed to find ways to actively include beneficiaries in policy making. Public recognition and learning processes in participatory settings can then foster empowerment.

Another important issue has been education: as self-organized entities need basic preparation and training for the labour market, the most excluded sectors of society cannot instantly join self-managed organisations such as cooperatives and associations. To deal with this problem, special institutions of social assistance were created to prepare the most excluded to participate in the labour market. In the city of São Paulo, financial contributions of the city government were vital, paying a diverse range of social workers and providing for locations for on-the-job-training. In the countryside, such efforts were linked to the national government programme 'Brazil without misery' (Brasil sem miséria) and the National Secretariat for Solidarity-Based Economy, which coordinated efforts and channeled resources of social assistance. Given these initial efforts by public and private entities, the internal training has been largely organised by the MNCR itself, reflecting its autonomous strength and ambitions.

Problems involve the managing of intra-organisational tensions. Within the cooperatives and associations, a code of conduct regulates a set of norms and rules, with the intention to minimise possible intra-organisational tensions and conflicts. As the collectors come from the excluded parts of the population, problems related to alcohol and drug abuse exist. Despite controversial discussion, the use of such substances is strictly prohibited within the confines of the organisations. Another rule which has been reported as controversially discussed is the use of security clothing, which is mandatory for the associated collectors. While these rules help to mediate internal tensions, they can also lead to exclusion. Despite constantly growing numbers of collectors being organised guided by MNCR's principles, the majority is still working independently and informally. Statistics for the year 2008 suggest that only 43 per cent of Brazilian collectors worked in a collectively organised way (author's own calculation, based on statistical data by IPEA, cited in Pinhel 2013: 18). This

relatively high percentage of non-collectively organised collectors is a good indicator of the importance of this contradiction between the advantages of organisation and the resulting restrictions on the individual freedom of workers.

8. Conclusions

This contribution described the emergence and proliferation of the Brazilian social movement of collectors of recyclable material, and its gradually deepened inclusion, as an interesting example of social innovation. This process included the promotion of social justice regarding 'redistribution', 'recognition', and 'representation', as laid out by Fraser (1995).

After overcoming special difficulties due to marginalisation, the collectors were able to form an institutionalised national movement from the early 2000s onwards. The comparably late consolidation of the MNCR can be explained by the rather marginalised role of the collectors of recyclable material. Therefore, their connection to governments and the support by the latter has always been vital for the MNCR. The initial steps towards empowerment have been strongly supported by NGOs and local government actors. In the course of the events, the collectors were empowered up to a point when they were able to form a social movement on the national scale in the early 2000s. Given the marginalisation and exclusion of the collectors, together with the enormous size of Brazil, the difficulty as well as the importance of this step cannot be underestimated. From 2003 onwards, specific national policies have been set up for the collectors of recyclable material, also involving them actively in policy making through participation. Joint efforts of the Ministries of Employment and Income (especially by the National Secretariat for Solidarity-Based Economy, a branch of the Ministry of Employment and Income), environment, and social affairs, and of state-owned enterprises (banks and the petrol company), all coordinated by the presidency, pushed the political importance of the collectors to unprecedented levels.

Political inclusion was vital to secure better working conditions: legal recognition and public subsidies directly geared towards the collectors (instead of intermediaries in the value chain of recycling) were vital in

promoting processes of redistribution. From the perspective of civil society, the collective organisation of the collectors according to the principles of SSE was decisive. Recognition went beyond the actions of the state, as public opinion also improved considerably. Assisted by the inclusion of collectors into efforts for environmental education, they began to be seen as fulfilling an important role, rather than as simply poor or delinquent people. “What changed between 2000 and 2015 is that we no longer discuss whether there should be collectors or not. We discuss what work conditions are decent for them to provide a service that is necessary for the cities”, as Grimberg explained in our interview.

This case thus shows the complex interplay of different forms of promoting social justice in a governance setting of ‘bottom-linked’ solutions. Together with the collective nature of empowerment, this sort of political approach is very promising for fostering social innovation, despite the involved problems and contradictions.

- 1 Information about the projects can be obtained at the following websites: <http://at.solidarityeconomy.eu/>; <http://improve-research.eu/>. Both projects have been financed by the European Commission.
- 2 Research on working conditions in the SSE sector pointed out that a considerable number of enterprises abuse the legal loopholes created by the emergence of SSE: many companies are formally cooperatives, but are actually run as conventional firms. Thereby, workers’ legal protection is bypassed. In such companies, the main problems are the non-existence of internal democracy and unequal payment (Leite et al. 2015).
- 3 Fábio Sanchez works at the Universidade Federal de São Carlos, specialising in the sociology of work and social and solidarity economy. He coordinated the incubator for SSE at the Universidade de São Paulo at the end of the 1990s and worked in different positions at the National Sub-Ministry of SSE (Secretaria Nacional de Economia Solidária) in the national government during the 2000s. Paul Singer is an economist and Professor Emeritus at the Universidade de São Paulo. He is among the most important intellectuals in the Workers’ Party (PT) and was one of the first promoters of SSE in Brazil. Since its creation in 2003 and the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016 he was the head (Secretário) of the Secretário Nacional de Economia Solidária.
- 4 Elizabeth Grimberg is a sociologist and Co-Director of Instituto Pólis in São Paulo, an important NGO engaged with social movements and the right to the city. She was one of the founders of the ‘Fórum Lixo e Cidadania’ and active in the formulation of the national policy framework for solid waste (Política Nacional de Resíduos Sólidos).

- 5 In our field research, we visited ‘Recifran’, one of four centres responsible for the city of São Paulo at the time. The participants in this training centre were sent by the local authorities, to be trained to work in one of the cooperatives later on. In addition to the field visit, we also conducted an interview with the coordinator of the centre, the social worker Talita Tecedor.
- 6 Ana Carla de Almeida is an environmental analyst, working at the Brazilian Ministry of the Environment (Ministério do Meio Ambiente).
- 7 Eduardo de Paula is one of the founders of the first collectors’ cooperative ‘Coopamare’, and a political leader of the MNCR.

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Abstract Der Beitrag fokussiert soziale Inklusion von marginalisierten Personen mittels sozialer Innovation. Theoretisch auf Frasers „3-R-Zugang“ basierend, wird soziale Inklusion als mehrdimensionaler Prozess verstanden, der Umverteilung, Anerkennung und Repräsentation mit einschließt. Empirisch wird die brasilianische soziale Bewegung der SammlerInnen verwertbaren Materials untersucht. Diese historisch besonders marginalisierte Gruppe schaffte es, ein landesübergreifendes Netzwerk als soziale Bewegung zu institutionalisieren. Auf diesem Erfolg aufbauend gelang es ab 2003, die soziale und politische Inklusion zu vertiefen. Der Beitrag beschreibt diesen Prozess als „bottom-linked“, als einen Mittelweg zwischen „top-down“-Politik des Staates und „bottom-up“-Prozessen seitens der Zivilgesellschaft.

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