



Young Europe: realities, dilemmas and opportunities for the new generation

Barcelona, 16-18 July 2014

Block B: Social Issues and Opportunities

Cooperating for the future. The formation of citizens' collectivities in the perspective of Europe's past and present

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Abstract

Parallel to the downward spiral in which the European economy and society has seemed to end up over the past few years, a very different evolution seems to be going on: new institutions arise constantly, institutions that we can describe as institutions for collective action, where cooperation and self-regulation form the jumping-off point for daily practice, with citizens taking matters into their own hands to address local problems. These institutions emerge from the bottom-up, through the efforts of ordinary citizens filling in needs, throughout Europe. In the Netherlands for example, since 2005, over 300 collectives for energy were founded, aimed both at generating energy and at the collective purchase of energy from companies on the free market. Furthermore, many initiatives were established that provide healthcare - ranging from residential communities for the elderly, elderly care cooperatives, and day care centers, to cooperatives of GPs and physiotherapists.[1] In this paper, it will be demonstrated that this development is in itself not unique but comparable to two "waves of cooperation" in the past: one to be situation in the early modern period (1200-1600), and one in the period 1880-1920. What is most striking is that all these waves were preceded by periods of intensified market exchange and that today –contrary to what is often claimed- these new institutions should not be considered as "symptoms" of the current crisis but rather as a reaction to the negative consequences and limitations of the functioning of the market. Notwithstanding the numerous similarities both in institutional design and causes that can be found between the three waves of cooperation, there are also a number of striking differences. In this presentation a number of differences and similarities in a 1000 year institutions for collective action and the implications for Europe's future of a further development of new institutions for collective action will be discussed.

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