

Barter: Ancestral Tradition That Is Reborn in a Pandemic

By: Claudia M. Concha*, Gerardo I. Sánchez*, Carolina A. Rojas*

*Universidad Católica del Maule, Talca – Chile

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Abstract

This paper deals with the “barter” exchange initiative promoted by the Centro Integral de Innovación Social (CIIS) de la Universidad Católica del Maule (UCM), Chile. The objective is to develop an alternative to the market economy that seeks to alleviate the food needs in rural communities during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Introduction

This paper deals with the “barter” exchange initiative promoted by the Centro Integral de Innovación Social (CIIS) de la Universidad Católica del Maule (UCM), Chile. The objective is to develop an alternative to the market economy that seeks to alleviate the food needs in rural communities during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

From the contributions developed by the Social and Solidarity Economy, the notion of endogenous economic rationality is assumed, which favors local development through cooperation and associativity, where the solidarity dimension refers to a diverse set of practices present in the economic process that seeks to guarantee the security of livelihoods, democratizing the economy and its processes (Castelao & Srnec, 2013).

Bartering is an ancestral tradition that both native peoples and rural communities habitually practiced and that, under linear economic models, has disappeared. Conceptually, it refers to the exchange of objects or services without the intermediary of a monetary value, where reciprocity and exchange are fundamental, and whose purposes are not commercial and occurs without currency as exchange value(...)” (Argueta & Cortez, 2016). The multiplicity of barter records in different contexts allows it to be differentiated from other forms of exchange (monetary and non-monetary). Among its main particularities, it stands out: the element of the demand for particular things, which belong to different types. In other cases, it can be articles exchanged for merchandise or for other services.

However, in recent decades due to complex socioeconomic processes, bartering has been revitalized and is due, on the one hand, to a practical response to the real and current needs of society and, on the other hand, is oriented to change in social relations and economic systems, from solidarity and alternative values, ideas, and projects (Razeto, 2000).

The Process from the UCM Integral Center for Social Innovation

Today, universities are strongly challenged in their public role and, ultimately, in achieving an institutional task that demonstrates their social commitment. This implies the challenge of moving from a model that traditionally privileged vertical, protective, and care relationships with the environment towards another that is signifying policies and procedures aimed at generating meaningful dialogue and permanent institutionalized exchange with the relevant actors in the environment. The strong relationship of the communities with their territories calls for development strategies of a multidimensional nature. This has to be subject to continuous transformation processes that require the ability to cooperate for the co-created design of solutions.

Contributing, then, from the university to participatory governance as a means of co-construction contributes to the sense of relevance of the territory itself for identifying its needs and constructing shared solutions.

This experience was developed in San Clemente, a rural commune in the Maule Region, based on a registry of needs generated by the community because of the pandemic. The goods exchange initiative was carried out with 150 low-income peasant families, members of the Rural Development Program (PRODESAL), and 12 Elderly Adult Clubs in the community.

The foregoing strengthened within the framework of the health emergency product of the pandemic generated by the advance of the COVID-19 virus and its multiple health and socioeconomic consequences. This prompted this collaboration with the San Clemente community. The results were in constructing a solidarity barter route, aiming to build a bridge of collaboration between the most vulnerable members of the community. As pointed out by (Eroski Consumer, 2005), the contemporary appearance of this form of exchange is then linked to extreme situations where the circulating currency is not enough to cope with normal transactions in a society.



Figure 1: The process of Barter in rural community

The development of solidarity barter was organized through participatory work, where it was decided to exchange non-perishable food and products from the small farmers' gardens for a cleaning and sanitation kit delivered by the university. The food collected was used for the commune's solidarity dining room and common pots in the sector, thus covering more than 1000 beneficiary families. The results show an experience highly valued by the community, who in the surveys show that 90% of the users are "very satisfied" with the work carried out by the CIIS UCM in the territory. When consulting regarding the relevance of this type of activity, 93% of those surveyed indicate that they "strongly agree" with the development of these activities, and 94% state that they "strongly agree" to participate in this type of project and/or action again. As an answer to the question, "Do you consider that this type of activity/project is a contribution or an impact on you?" 99% of users indicate that they "strongly agree" or "agree" with this statement.

In this sense, the university, beyond its educational role, is an agent that favors the articulation and strengthening of the social fabric. From this notion of territory as a social construction, the opportunity opens to deploy actions that allow the creation of shared knowledge, facilitating dialogue and reciprocal relationships.

Final Thoughts

It can be seen, a transforming barter network that is generated from the community in San Clemente where the Solidarity Economy emerges as a solution to the needs of the territory. The university constitutes a network of social capital insofar as it has an important power to "get entangled" with other agents and thus generate knowledge in tune with social realities (De la Cruz and Sasia, 2008). In this recognition of the commitment to social justice, universities currently tend to promote processes of structural change that allow rethinking the idea of the university as a closed space, self-referential and away from the social context with which it intervenes or studies (Saravia, 2017).

In this way, barter emerges as a collective solution based on the needs of the territory and for those who participate in the experience (universities and territories), it constitutes a gateway for what Bozzano (2009) proposes as territorial intelligence, understood as the way in which public actors and citizens with scientific contributions, and build more sustainable territories and places.

More information: <https://youtu.be/ATj6BdGWmLA>

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