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LGBTQ+ Inclusion and the Social and Solidarity Economy

Vincenza Priola, *The Open University, UK*
Saoirse C. O'Shea, *The Open University, UK*

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Abstract

The entry discusses the inclusion/exclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and minority sexuality and gender people (LGBT*) and showcases many social and solidarity economy (SSE) organisations that operate in different regions of the world to support their rights. The entry emphasises that the wider SSE sector is better placed than the commercial sector to support the work and social inclusion of LGBT* people, due to its commitment to individuals' well-being, to communities and to the environment.

Keywords: LGBT*; equality; needs; inclusion; diversity; sexual discrimination

Introduction

This entry explores meanings and possibilities for the work and social inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and minority sexuality and gender people (LGBT)*, and considers the role that the social and solidarity economy (SSE) may have in promoting their social, political and economic inclusion (also see the entry “work integration and SSE”). In this entry, the SSE is viewed with reference to a wide range of non-capitalist practises and organising principles across the economic, social, political and communitarian spheres, that aim to build an economy and society that support people and the environment (also see the entry “Contemporary understandings of the SSE”).

Research shows that discrimination against LGBT* people is persistent and pervasive, affecting work organisations (Colgan and Rumens 2015), housing (Romero, Goldberg and Vascuez 2020), quality of life (LGBT TOKEN 2022) and basic human rights (Katz-Wise and Hyde 2012). LGBT* people continue to endure limitations in human, social and economic rights across the world. Homosexuality remains illegal in more than 70 countries across the world, with LGBT* people experiencing open hostility and violence. On the other hand, legal rights and social recognition have been achieved by gay, lesbian and transgender people in many nations in the Global North, where legislations exist which protect their equal rights in work and society. Despite the legal protection offered by this legislation, discrimination remains common, whilst it is more subtle and sometimes more difficult to prove. Furthermore, although the acronym used in this entry embraces many sexualities, it is important to emphasise that transgender and gender-fluid people continue to be subjected to considerably more violence and exclusion than gay or lesbian individuals, with no recent evidence of improvements to their social and economic opportunities. This discrimination often results in mental and physical health issues and social isolation, alongside estrangement from family (Potoczniak, et al. 2009), as social stigma often negatively impacts family support and the benefits which can be derived from it (Hazel and Kleyman 2020).

This entry defines inclusion as distinct from equality and diversity. The concept of *equality* is generally embedded in legislation designed to address harassment and discrimination, focusing on the provision of equal opportunities to all (i.e. everyone is treated the same), regardless of sexuality, sexual orientation, gender, race, colour, ethnicity, disability, religion, age and so on. On the other hand, while equality addresses equal treatment, *diversity* acknowledges and recognises differences among people. Human rights and individual freedom are at the core of the diversity approach with the differences that exist among people inherently respected and valued. Meanwhile, the concept of *inclusion* focuses on outcomes, and refers to the individual’s experience of the extent to which they feel valued, welcomed and able to fully participate in decision-making. It also encapsulates the availability and accessibility of development opportunities for individuals within organisations and society. The following section considers LGBT* inclusion in more detail and explains how SSE can contribute to LGBT* inclusion in work and society.

1. What is LGBT* inclusion?

Efforts of organisations to consider the needs of LGBT* individuals have focused on diversity and diversity management approaches, often influenced by national legislation and/or social movements. For example, in the European Union (EU), the Employment Equality Framework Directive of 2000 has established a legal agenda to be incorporated into the legislation of EU countries, making it illegal to discriminate in the workplace on the basis of sexual orientation, among other categories. The diversity management approach taken by commercial organisations has often focused on the business case, which argues that employing a diverse workforce that represents the customer/consumer base brings a competitive advantage to the firm (Otaye-Ebede, et al. 2020). However, it can be argued that the business case is not sufficient to sustain the commitment to diversity, as organisations should also uphold a moral argument to support minority groups. Commercial and social enterprises, in particular, ought to take into account the moral case for social justice, which highlights an obligation to compensate for the oppression that minority groups, especially LGBT*, have endured (and continue to endure) in society. Furthermore, the diversity approach adopted by organisations generally focuses on numerical differences and similarities of employees, heavily relying on statistics and often neglecting the different needs of diverse individuals. Some scholars (e.g. Kumra and Manfredi 2012) argue that organisations should, instead, focus on inclusion as a means to involve, support and value employees as unique individuals so that they can be fully recognised in their identities, feeling a sense of belonging and recognition when participating and contributing to the organisation. Inclusion, therefore, means the involvement of individuals in the decision-making process in order to ensure that their input is integrated into the organisational actions. It is an outcome measured by the scale to which LGBT* people (and all individuals who belong to minority groups) feel that they are welcomed and supported.

2.SSE and the work and social inclusion of LGBT*

Whilst there have been few empirical studies that have considered economic development in relation to LGBT* people (Badgett, Waaldijk and van der Meulen Rodgers 2019), research shows that positive changes in LGBT* rights and inclusion lead to improved economic development (Badgett et al. 2014). The inclusion and acceptance of LGBT* people “is an indicator of an underlying culture that’s open and conducive to creativity” (Florida and Tinagli 2004, p. 25) and can contribute to a country’s economic development. Badgett, Waaldijk and van der Meulen Rodgers (2019) estimated the relationship between per capita GDP and LGBT* legal rights (as measured by the Global Index on Legal Recognition of Homosexual Orientation – GILRHO) across a large range of countries between 1966 and 2011. They reported that the inclusion of LGBT* people is linked to a stronger economy, with one additional legal right in the GILRHO index (out of eight legal rights in total) associated with 2,065 USD more in per capita GDP.

LGBT* people are widely discriminated against in many countries, experiencing: violence; workplace, health and educational discrimination, resulting in loss of productivity; economic deprivation; social and familial marginalisation and exclusion; and lowered life expectancy (Badgett, Waaldijk and van der Meulen Rodgers 2019; Badgett 2014). A UN source (UN Human Rights, 2015) cites that the costs of homophobia and transphobia to the economy is 32 Billion USD a year, an amount equal in size to India’s economy. In the case of transgender people, discrimination and marginalisation

result in increased rates of under- and unemployment, poverty, homelessness, substance misuse, suicidal ideation and suicide, and criminalisation (Grant et al. 2011). LGBT* people commonly present as forced migrants and refugees, as a consequence of fleeing repressive regimes, persecution, and torture (Forced Migration Review, 2013; Jordan 2011), or further, fleeing exploitation and victimisation by, for example, sex traffickers. There is, therefore, an economic, social and ethical necessity to consider how LGBT* people may be best included in work organisations that recognise and value their contribution. Due to their commitment to supporting people and society, SSE organisations and enterprises (SSEOs) represent a key channel for the work and social inclusion of LGBT* people.

Priola et al. (2014 and 2018) conducted a study with social cooperatives based in Italy which were founded to support the employment of people who are disadvantaged in the labour market, such as disabled individuals, drug addicts and ex-convicts, among others. The authors of the study analysed the inclusion practises of these cooperatives to assess whether, and how, such organisations extended their core aim of inclusion to other groups, such as LGBT*, who are not formally considered disadvantaged, but are often ostracised and discriminated against at work and in society. In view of the fact that such organisations are part of the SSE and work 'against normativity' in supporting people who do not fit within the normative standards of the 'typical worker', they were expected to show a culture of inclusion extending to a diverse workforce in general. However, the authors found that the efforts of these social cooperatives to 'include' their employees remained grounded on heteronormativity, which is defined as "the expectations, demands and constraints produced when heterosexuality is taken as normative within a society and thus when biological gender roles fit with sexuality" (Priola et al. 2014; p. 489). In these social cooperatives, interventions to support the inclusion of socially disadvantaged groups were clearly based on individual psychological support and group-based actions aimed at developing individual resilience. However, alongside their supportive ethos, the authors found that these cooperatives were characterised by a heterosexist culture, revealed in discriminatory practices such as silence, gossip and derogatory comments that were generally accepted and justified as banter. The importance of considering sexual orientation in the workplace was neglected by these social cooperatives on the basis of the fact that sexuality and sexual orientation belonged to the private sphere of life rather than to the work environment. LGBT* individuals were 'included' as long as they did not flaunt their diversity. Most lesbian and gay workers remained in the closet. As an example, transgender employees felt excluded because they visibly did not conform to normative conventions associated with the fit between gender and sex. They reported that they had been asked to move from a customer-facing position to a 'hidden' role and that colleagues often avoided conversations beyond mundane daily exchanges, preventing them from establishing friendships. Priola et al. (2018) suggest that the organisational practises observed reproduce cultural discourses present at the national level, characterising the Italian society and reinforcing the view that LGBT* sexualities should remain confined to the private aspect of life, and excluded from work organisations. The authors of the study reconnect these aspects to the importance that Italian society places on the institution of the family in its traditional form, which is embedded in the historical legacies of fascism and the influence of the Catholic church.

While this study shows how these specific social cooperatives have missed the opportunity to be fully inclusive, we argue that SSE organisations of all types have a great

potential to be inclusive of LGBT* individuals. We now turn our attention to consider specific SSE LGBT* organisations.

3. SSE organisations supporting LGBT* peoples

LGBT* organisations vary in size, whom they represent and how, and the issues that they cover. They include large national organisations such as Stonewall in the UK, GLAAD in the United States and Arcigay in Italy, who campaign on all issues that are of importance to their national LGBT* communities. As well to these LGBT* national organisations there are single-issue organisations and/or those that focus on a specific group within the LGBT* community, such as transgender people. Examples of these organisations include Mermaids in the UK (a charity focused on supporting transgender children) and the Sylvia Rivera Law Project in the USA (focused on the legal rights and protections of transgender people in the US), and other regional and local, self-organised groups. Some organisations support the economic development of the LGBT* community, for example, by listing LGBT* businesses in specific areas. Among these, 'Pink Spots - The LGBT Directory' in San Francisco (USA), lists LGBTQ owned and friendly businesses in the area (divided across many categories) as well as events and LGBTQ news.

LGBT* people are diverse and have multiple needs, which may reflect the local realities of indigenous people. Such individuals have been marginalised both by their country and by the concerns of a Global North which focuses on economic development (Budhiraja, Fried and Teixeira 2010). In this sense, sexual and gender identities may have a cultural context rather than a simple, uniform one (Altman 2004; Katyal 2005). For example, many countries and cultures have, for centuries, included diverse gender identities, such as muxe people in Mexico, Kinnar people in the Indian subcontinent, kathoey people in Thailand and third gender indigenous American people in the United States. The term 'transgender', as a 20th Century Anglo-American term, neither reflects these histories nor the difference between these peoples. On this account, local SSEOs may have a better understanding and ability than a multinational non-governmental organisation (NGO) to appeal to, represent and aid fragmented and disparate communities. Doan (2010) argues that there is a need to: a) undermine social-control mechanisms, through personal and local acts that question normative assumptions of 'correct' sex and gender behaviour and presentation; b) mitigate social control through international conditions by building international coalitions that question repression, such as Sisterhood Is Global International (SIGI) and Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) in the Middle East, both of which resist Islamic fundamentalism through regional and international coalition building; and c) strengthen local coalitions – whilst international NGOs can help, local groups must lead local action.

In addition to specific LGBT* organisations, other SSEOs can support the inclusion of LGBT* individuals in the economy and society due to their mission of prioritising the welfare of people over profit and business imperatives. Within a 2021 document, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) advocates the cooperative advantage for the transgender community suggesting that it:

- helps to create employment and improve income;
- supports the transition from the informal to the formal community;

- provides access to services such as finance, housing and care;
- generates resources and bargaining power;
- promotes education and training, and supports economic democracy;
- lobbies for workers' rights and inclusion.

They provide a few examples of LGBT* cooperatives such as:

- Estilo Diversa – the textile cooperative in Argentina, formed in 2010 by a LGBT* collective that specialises in producing theatre costumes and fashion wear for the LGBT* community. After the first cooperative was formed in Buenos Aires, other LGBT* cooperatives were formed in Bahía Blanca, Comodoro Rivadavia and Córdoba.
- Trans Welfare Cooperative Society - formed in 2018 in Kerala, India, by the Left Democratic Front government to provide financial assistance facilitating hospitality business ventures, the creation of temporary shelters for homeless transgender people, and the creation of pension schemes for transgender people over 60.
- LGBT Place of Refuge - the Multipurpose Cooperative in the Philippines, formed in 2010 by a LGBT* collective to provide a wide range of opportunities including business credit, capacity development, health and accident insurance and other benefits.

4.Examples of international organisations supporting LGBT* peoples across the world

Many international organisations supporting LGBT* individuals share SSE principles or have SSE organisations as their members. Among the international associations and organisations supporting LGBT* people are:

ILGA World – International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association. It brings together more than 1,600 organisations from over 150 countries and campaigns for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex human rights.

ILGLaw specifically provides legal information and policy support.

IGLYO – International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex (LGBTQI) Youth and Student Organisation. It is the largest LGBT* youth and student network in the world, operating in more than 40 countries.

GATE - an international advocacy organization supporting justice and equality for transgender, gender diverse and intersex communities. It works with global partners to provide knowledge, resources and access to UN mechanisms and bodies.

GRIN - Global Respect in Education. A transatlantic non-profit organisation and advocacy group which campaigns primarily for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) people's social and political equality in education. It seeks to end discrimination, harassment, and bullying based on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression in all educational institutes. It is run by students.

Kaleidoscope Trust - works to uphold the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT+) people in countries around the world where they are discriminated against or marginalised due to their sexual orientation, gender identity and/or gender expression.

5.Examples of national-local organisations supporting LGBT* people

While listing national SSE organisations that support LGBT* people is a challenging task, in this section we want to give a few examples from countries in the Global South. We have chosen to focus on the Global South in this section because there is often a tendency to consider the Global North as more egalitarian than the Global South. Puar (2007) discusses homonationalism as a process by which the claims of the LGBT* social movement are used by some groups, such as far-right parties, to justify racism and xenophobic positions, particularly against Muslim people and migrants from countries considered homophobic. Far-right parties in the Global North often use LGBT* rights and sexual diversity to sustain their political stance against migration. Alexander (2005) argues that scholars in the Global North generally view the degree of development of LGBT* movements and rights by Global North standards and neoliberal ideologies, and presuppose that the Global North has the answers to the Global South's problems. However, as Puar (2007) argues, the use of LGBT* social movements by certain groups generally focuses on the rhetoric of equality, and neglects to acknowledge the homophobia and discrimination that LGBT* people still experience in Western societies. The exceptionality of the simplistic homonationalistic accounts used by some groups in the Global North is questioned by LGBT* communities in many countries in the Global South. Rights such as same-sex marriage reflect heteronormativity but do not always correspond to full equality or equal treatment.

The remainder of this section lists a few organisations supporting LGBT* people.

In Bolivia 'Mujeres Creando' is a feminist collective that participates in actions tackling homophobia, anti-poverty and racism via participatory methods such as street theatre, workshops, and also via publishing and TV programmes. 'Familia Galan', another Bolivian organisation, formed in 2001 by a group of transgender artists and activists, challenges the machismo that dominates Bolivia's public and political lives. They produce a TV show, and a magazine, using street theatre and performance to question repression and oppression. This local organising through the arts is important as it can involve people across classes, ages, races etc. It also brings the LGBT* community and its issues into the spotlight.

In India, CREA (Creating Resources for Empowerment and Action) works with structurally excluded women, individuals of diverse sexualities, genders and sex characteristics, disabled individuals, and sex workers to advocate their broader inclusion and solidarity. They organise a range of programmes and events, develop resources to advance human rights, build feminist leadership and expand sexual and reproductive freedoms.

In Turkey, Lambda Istanbul is an LGBT* organisation that reports human rights violations and runs campaigns to amend the Constitution of Turkey to include sexual orientation and sexual identity among the categories protected by the discrimination legislation. Lambda Istanbul organises panel discussions, LGBT* film screenings, symposia and a variety of LGBT* solidarity activities.

Helem was established in Beirut, Lebanon, in 2001 to support the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of LGBT* people and any non-conforming sexualities

or gender identities in Lebanon, and the South West Asia and North Africa regions. They work with young LGBT* leaders to empower local actions through education and community building and create initiatives and spaces to build community power and mobilise changes in legislation, policies and practices to improve the quality of life of the LGBT* communities.

In the Dominican Republic, Amigos Siempre Amigos (ASA) is a social advocacy organisation that promotes AIDS prevention and fights for the rights of LGBT* people in the Dominican Republic, which currently has no legislation protecting LGBT* people from discrimination.

In South Africa, the Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW) is an organisation raising issues of violence affecting black lesbians and the wider LGBT* community. It works to build alliances with the state and creates networks across the regions.

In Namibia, The Rainbow Project (TRP) and Sister Namibia are two SSE organisations that oppose SWAPO Party's 'homosexuality is un-African' message and its subsequent hostility against the LGBT* community, including threats and penalties for sodomy. As highlighted by Currier (2011), state leaders in some African nations position LGBT* as a colonial import, arguing that LGBT* sexualities did not exist within pre-colonial African societies (hence the SWAPO argument that homosexuality is 'un-African').

Conclusions

Limited research has explored LGBT* inclusion and the SSE. This entry has discussed some of the issues that LGBT* people face in society and in the workplace and argued that SSEOs have the potential to support the economic and social inclusion of LGBT* people. SSEOs are diverse, operating through a variety of models, and according to different aims, by providing services and goods to meet the needs of specific groups. In relation to LGBT* inclusion, they can have an important role that extends beyond their immediate aim(s) and can generate awareness of the oppression that LGBT* people experience, as well as a willingness to change on a much wider scale. The entry has provided examples of organisations that operate internationally and nationally in the Global South, to support the needs of LGBT* people.

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