

A New European Socioeconomic Perspective

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Abstract Over the past few decades a new associationism and cooperativism perspective that takes on a broader, civil-society and solidarity-based view of the economy has developed in France. This perspective resonates with the long tradition of “reform-economics” that France is known for and expresses an understanding of economic relationships as embedded in non-market and non-monetary social relationships. Such broadly understood conceptions of economic activity defy narrow definitions of profit orientation, production and distribution. Economic activity motives include social and political ones that link ‘civil entrepreneurs’ in solidarity networks to service recipients and other stakeholders. One of the functional foundations of this new interdependent notion of the economy is the growing ‘tertiarization’ of economic activities, that is the “intensification of social interactions within productive systems” (Perret and Roustang 1993: 59–60). While the market economy is dependent on the non-monetary economy, the tertiarisation of production activities accentuates the interdependence between the market economy and non-market economies.

This article seeks to analyze the links between the re-emergence of a civil and solidarity-based economy to the evolution of new forms of public commitment and the changing structures of productive activities in France. It further argues for a theoretical perspective that provides an analytical framework for a more comprehensive approach to the empirical complexity of social economic considerations consisting of three economic spheres:

the for-profit economy, the public sector economy and the generally locally based non-monetary reciprocity based economy. Given its ability to link these three poles the civil and solidarity-based economy can revitalize social and political link and consolidate the social fabric while at the same time creating jobs. Yet despite this potential, its mission cannot be to the problems of unemployment and other failures of the market economy. It is instead to facilitate relationships between paid and volunteer work in a

context that makes users, workers and volunteers the participants in collectively designed services and economic relationships.

Keywords: society, civil non profit organizations, cooperatives, stakeholders, social economics

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades a new associationism and cooperativism perspective that views the economy and its organizational structures and relationships from a civil-society-based and solidarity-based perspective has developed in France. These perspectives resonate with the long tradition of “reform-economics” that France is known for. During the first half of the nineteenth century this tradition took the form of a solidarity-based economics project that was followed by the creation of social economics with its organizational expressions of non-for-profit associations, cooperatives and mutual societies. Yet with the rise of post-World War II industrialization, social economics progressively lost in importance. More recently, however, the rapid globalization process has provoked a new wave of initiatives. This has at least partly regenerated and given new strength to social economics by claiming a new political and social-economic project that contests the absolutization of market-economics and its concomitant market-society.

While this recent questioning of the unencumbered power of market-economics has come from many sources what is specific to the French context is its focus on the economic dimensions of the organizational and institutional expressions of civil society. The need for this broader, context-based economic focus originated in the civil society organizations and in the academy and was only recently recognized in the political arena. At the local and regional level several hundred elected representatives in France have initiated various forms of organizational expression and support for broader, social economic initiatives in the last decade; at the national level the French government initiated a State Secretariat of Civil and Solidarity-Based Economics for the first time between 2000 and 2002. And France is not an isolated exception. A number of South America countries took similar steps as for the new Brazilian government that initiated a State Secretariat with a similar focus to the French Secretariat of Civil and Solidarity-based Economics in 2003. The European Union, too, launched pilot projects and structural initiatives have stressed the importance of creating institutional and policy entities that combine economic goals with social objectives in an effort “to meet the needs unsatisfied by the market” and to promote “a new sense of

entrepreneurship. This sense of entrepreneurship is closer to the aspirations and values of people that do not seek profit making but rather the development of socially useful activities or jobs.” It thus plays an important “role in promoting social cohesion and economic local performance” (European Commission 1998: 4; for a further discussion see also Lloyd 2004).

Of course a significant tension exists between this new social economics perspective and a contradictory but far stronger trend toward the continued marketization of services that promotes the shift of all types of services, including social support services that were previously firmly embedded in the welfare state, into the market economy. In short, support for the social economics perspective cited above is not unanimous within the EU. There is a more dominant view of EU integration that reduces all activity to a single market that leaves no room for a civil society based perspective. Yet differing, broader-based views persist even within EU institutions as well as within local and national institutions in each individual EU member country. This tension between the social economics and the marketization perspective also forms the backdrop for a growing public debate about the relationship between the economy and society as well as between economic and social goals, that can best be described in academic terms as the emergence of a new economic sociology debate.

This article seeks to contribute to such a new debate. Its perspective is specifically informed by the French context and France’s current economic reality. In its first section the article seeks to link the re-emergence of a civil and solidarity-based economy to the evolution of new forms of public commitment and the changing structures of productive activities. In its second part the article provides some evidence for these new developments in the French and the European context. And finally, the article argues for a theoretical perspective that provides an analytical framework for a comprehensive approach to the empirical complexity of social economic considerations.

A NEW DYNAMIC

The globalization process with its deepening inequalities within countries as well as between countries of the North and South has generated strong reactions. One of the most prominent expression of these reactions has come in the form of civil society networks such as those involved in the World and European Social Forums. Those groups among them that have focused on the project of defining a civil and solidarity-based economics have specifically combined political dimensions with economic ones. To understand this

collective dual-dimensional focus and its implications and actions, it is necessary to consider the public engagement these initiatives reveal and to incorporate into the discussion the phenomenon of the ‘tertiarisation’ of productive activities.

Evolving Forms of Public Commitment

Traditional forms of commitment in the public sphere have changed in two ways that are seemingly contradictory. On the one hand, general-interest activism, involving long-term action and strong delegations of authority within federative structures, has lost in impact. This is illustrated by the weakening role of trade-unions and their ideological affiliations. On the other hand, the crisis in voluntarism, evident even in some of the most institutionalized voluntary associations, has been accompanied by the emergence of short-term, concrete commitments in associations aimed at providing solutions to specific problems (Ion 1997; Barthélémy 2001).

One of the questions this contrasting development raises concerns the interrelationship between voluntary work and political and social participation. From the early 1970s on, people had begun to question the prominent and growing perspective that suggested that citizens could be equated with consumers, patients or taxpayers. Various groups started to take action outside the traditional social movements to combat this limiting notions. These new movements generally combined social co-operation, mutual aid and protest including in their roles the delivery of specific services and jobs while at the same time relating and engaging in issues of social cohesion and active social engagement. This new participatory approach is, different from traditional concepts of involvement and social activism that had been influential before the emergence of the new social movements and initiatives. And interestingly, the new forms of movements and initiatives were at least in part facilitated by economic trends.

The “Tertiarization” Process

The expansion of productive and service oriented relationships involved a change in the content of industrial employment and its inclusion of more complex forms of cooperation and mobilization of resources. At the same time, the notion of competition expanded beyond price-based competition to quality-based competition and competition based on delivery time. The result was a massive process of innovation and the introduction of new technologies,

especially those integrating microelectronics and microcomputers, and their resulting reduction of work force needs particularly in manufacturing. Statistics for the period from 1973 to 1982 show a loss of 743,000 manufacturing jobs in France, 1,526,000 in Germany, 51,000 in Italy, and 2,057,000 in the United Kingdom. This decline, which has continued during the twenty years period following the 1980s can be only partially explained by such new trends as “outsourcing” and the increased reliance of the manufacturing sector on subcontracting for certain activities from consulting to cleaning, payroll and security services.

At the same time, services are acquiring greater importance as a share of overall employment. The services, however, are not a homogeneous category. Distinctions can be made based on their productive configurations, that is, based on the relationships that different types of services establish between work, technologies and organizational structures. Two main types of services can be identified:

- Standardizable services cover logistical services (transportation, mass distribution, etc.) and administrative services (banking, insurance, administration, etc.). Both are becoming more akin to mass production or assembly line activities previously associated with the manufacturing sector. These services, which are mainly focused on objects or technical systems and often deal with encoded information, have been drastically changed by the use of new information technologies. Their similarities with manufacturing jobs also pose similar limitations with respect to their job creation capacity.
- Relational services (Baumol 1987, Roustang 1987), on the other hand, confer a key role on the service functions because their activity is based on direct interaction between the producer or service provider and the service recipient. Relational services seek to influence the organization’s delivery for corporate services and to improve the physical, intellectual or moral status of the users-customers through specific personalized services. New technologies merely support the service provider-service recipient relationship offering additional options with respect to the variety and qualitative improvements of the services delivered. Yet innovation and new technologies in the production process does not necessarily lead to standardization. Innovation may occur, but it is far more likely to alter complex work, not eliminate it. The differentiation and quality effect thus offsets the capital-labor substitution effect prevalent in standardized services, making it possible for these relational services to support ever new activities and new jobs. Despite the difficulties these new services have

posed from the perspective of national accounting and standardized code systems, since current accounting systems do not treat these relational services as a separate service category, available figures show that relational services have accounted for the far greatest share of job creation over the past two decades. Within the OECD countries (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), employment categories such as commerce, corporate services, hotels and restaurants, personal and domestic services, education, health-care, social services and public administration, all examples of relational services, account for the majority of jobs created and constitute a constantly growing share of job market.

The relevant distinction is therefore not between manufacturing and services but between two types of activities that coexist in the production sector: on the one hand there are standardisable manufacturing processes and services that offer high productivity growth potential and that have been essential to economic growth up to the 1970s but have faced clear limitations during the past three decades in terms of their employment share and job creation potential; and on the other hand there are relational services that play an ever more prominent and expanding role in today's economy and are crucial to the future creation of activities and jobs.

PROXIMITY SERVICES AND LOCAL INITIATIVES

A closer look at the available data for relational service reveals that particular sub-categories such as community, personal and social services show notable particularly strong growth: in 1990 these services accounted for 30 percent of employment in France, 38 percent in Sweden and 32 percent in the United Kingdom. A significant proportion of these services correspond to what in the French-speaking countries are called "services de proximité" or to use a literal translation that has become customary in Europe, "proximity services".¹ These services can be defined as services responding to individual or collective needs based on a definition of proximity that can be objective, in that it is anchored within a specific social space, or subjective, in that it refers to the relational dimension of the service. In the case of a subjective proximity definition, for example, the geographical proximity which is linked to the fact

¹ An approximate English translation of "services de proximité" would be "household and community services". However, to preserve the specificity of the notion in this text, the literal translation "proximity services" has been chosen.

that a particular service is delivered to individuals in their homes or within close proximity to their homes, coincides with a relational proximity because the service provider interacts with the service recipient wherever he or she lives, and thus gets involved in an interpersonal relationship with a service recipient or their family or neighborhood (Laville and Nyssens 2000).

Over the past few years Europe has seen a fairly strong emphasis on these proximity services. According to the European Commission (1993) they will likely create three million jobs to meet new needs arising from changing lifestyles, the transformation of family structures, the increase in women's professional activity and the aspirations of an aging population including the very old. To explore the issue in greater depth, the European Commission conducted a survey in order to determine which specific activities are involved in providing proximity services. Four major sectors were noted: "services associated with everyday needs, services to improve local amenities, cultural and recreational services, environmental services," which are further subdivided into 19 fields (European Commission 1995, 1996). The increased need for these individual and collective services stems from a variety of major trends in society—demographic, social and environmental. To mention just one of these changing needs one consider the impact of an aging population. While there are approximately 1.8 million people in France today who are eighty years old or older, there are expected to be 2.8 million 80 years and older in 2010. By 2020 the percentage of people over the age of 65 is expected to reach 20 percent across the European Union.

The main lesson learned from these European studies is that the development of proximity services both through the public sector and through private enterprises does not in and of itself fully explain the dynamics associated with the various initiatives emerging from within the civil society sphere. One of the challenges is the existence of information asymmetry and, even more challenging to the various stakeholders involved, the lack of definitional clarity about the tasks associated with these services. One response is the creation of proximity services through participatory approaches that may involve close contact between service providers and service users. The result of such participatory approaches is that many project promoters behave as "civic entrepreneurs" getting involved in economic activities for the sake of a more democratic society and by relying on social networks that share the same convictions. This is a phenomenon that is broader than the usual business start-ups and calls for a more collective entrepreneurship model. The European Commission has adopted the terminology "local initiatives for development and employment" when referring to this phenomenon.

A Solidarity-based Entrepreneurship

Given their more broadly defined objectives, initiatives associated with “local initiatives for development and employment” phenomenon are not driven by the profit motive alone and risk taking cannot be simply reduced to material risks and interest. Even though the desire for a return on investments is undoubtedly present this cannot be considered the only explanation for the entrepreneurs’ motivation. Entrepreneurship is instead characterized by the desire to promote democracy on the local level through economic activity. This is why the term ‘civic entrepreneurs’ is quite appropriate for this differently motivated group of entrepreneurs. Beyond the undeniable financial considerations to which they are attentive, these entrepreneurs are building new forms of “living together” based on an understanding of the common good that they share with other people, and that often unites them with others in social networks promoting this joint notion of the common good. In some cases, social network members are potential service users who allow the service providers to pinpoint demand and to respond to specific users demand. In other cases, network members are professionals who can play a mediating role and are skilled in identifying unmet social demand. They can also be mixed groups where users and professionals rub shoulders. This mixing of stakeholders and perspectives makes it possible to identify unsatisfied demand by bringing together individuals who have felt certain needs in their everyday lives and professionals sensitized to identifying certain problems. In spite of the differences in their profiles and the fact that there is a wide variety of individuals and groups represented, they all have one point in common: based on their personal experience they are all “demand-side stakeholders”, a suggestive term proposed by A. Ben Ner and T. Van Hommissen (1991). Their proximity to the user allows the promoter group to truly innovate in the area of services because their approach is based on an implicit or explicit perception that appropriate responses to the problems they identify are lacking. Their approach thus differs from standard approaches guided solely by market and consumer research. It is the local character of the services that constitutes their distinguishing feature and their emergence invokes the twofold notion of proximity in services: proximity services based on objective proximity anchored to a territory and a subjective proximity linked to the relational dimension of the service delivered.

Services for the elderly and childcare are two emblematic examples of the solidarity-based entrepreneurship model. To use an example from child care for instance, day care centers that offer close parent participation promoted

by the “Association des collectifs enfants-parents-professionnels” (Association of children-parents-professionals initiatives) are an example of the solidarity-based entrepreneurship model. Initiated initially by parents these daycare centers were later taken over by professional care providers who saw them as both an employment opportunity for themselves and as a means to ensure and monitor the quality of service provided through close relations with the parents. These child-care centers involving parental participation experienced the highest growth of all types of child-care facilities in France during the 1980s. Globally, participatory and association type initiatives have helped to create two thirds of the collective day care opportunities created during the 1980s. Similar to the French example, day care co-operatives emerged in Sweden, where non-municipal child-care facilities provided care for more than one tenth of the children cared for in day care centers by 1994. Co-operatives and associations thus contributed to the redeployment of existing services as much as to the creation of new ones. The “co-operatization” of social services (Pestoff, 1998) was formed primarily to increase the role of users, such as parents, in the organization of child-care services, and has been accepted because of the financial pressures on the public sector. Similar organizational forms emerged in the Mediterranean countries as well. There the legal status of co-operatives was used to propose services that the public sector was unable to provide. In Italy, for example, social co-operatives became popular in many areas because of their ability to perform new and much needed service such as the creation of jobs to segments of the population that had been excluded from the labor market (primarily women) while at the same time creating a variety of new services for individuals. Social cooperative emerged first in the 1970s and grew rapidly. By 1996, there were about 3000 of them, representing approximately 100,000 associates and providing services for several hundred thousand people (Borzaga 1997).

These examples show that the creation of a space for local dialogue based on interactive exchange, mutuality and respect aligns supply and demand and avoids stereotypical solutions to specific, community context based identified needs. Such micro-public spheres of discourse and exchange go beyond the joint production models typical of services; instead they exemplify a model of joint creativity. They promote supply and demand scenarios in which users play a crucial role either through their own direct involvement or through the indirect intervention of professionals who have become aware of unmet demands due to their immersion in the local social fabric or their association with other stakeholders who, for personal reasons, take responsibility for the issue or service under consideration.

From a gender perspective (Leira 1992, Lewis 1992), the fact that these initiatives contribute to the public sphere distinguishes them radically from the domestic economy. Through these “micro-public spheres”, supply and demand are shaped together through dialogue. As a result, micro-sphere models can address users’ fears that their privacy will not be respected as they help to formalize extremely diverse types of demand that may easily allow for the identification of personal characteristics. Micro-public spheres that are open to local discourse between different stakeholders act as autonomous public spheres (Calhoun 1992) and allow for the direct expression of people who through their engagement develop a shared understanding of the common, public good. They can be characterized as developing reflexivity in civil society by problematizing aspects of social relations that were previously exclusively discussed by a few experts (Giddens 1994).

The Growing Importance of Social Enterprises

Having noted that the kinds of local initiatives described above generally start out with a common structure and a similar set of risks, we may now analyze the processes through which they are institutionalized. These processes vary considerably.

The first institutionalized form is the for-profit business that relies primarily on market goods. In this organizational structure, the social support network that promotes the business becomes invisible and the business, which is above all dedicated to job creation and a strong work ethic, manages to become self-reliant and finances its operation through the sale of personal consumer services such as cleaning, ironing or security service.

The second form of institutionalization is the local government enterprise. Its objectives are of more broad based interest to a wider group of citizens. Its primary concern and focus are collective services. The cost of providing its services is assumed by the public sector such as local government entities that recognize the contribution of the service or initiative to the common good because it involves positive collective externalities, such as environmental protection for example, which must be covered by public funding since it cannot be assessed to individual service recipients.

While the for-profit business operation and the local government enterprise may appear to be the logical and familiar institutional forms through which services are provided, there is yet another common form. It is a hybrid of market, non-market and non-monetary goods and services forming a stable organization that goes beyond the temporary function generally associated

with the formation of an initiative. Its institutional form can best be described as a “social enterprise”—a private business with a social purpose (Borzaga and Defourny 2001). This form of organization is gaining rapid currency in Europe. Social enterprises could prove to be an appropriate solution to present day service needs since they provides services which are simultaneously individual and semi-collective, that is, they are services which provide benefits for the community as well as for the direct users. These services combat inequality, strengthen social bonds and articulate citizens’ concerns. Several European countries introduced new laws to allow for a multi-stakeholder social enterprise that involves volunteers, workers, service users and local authorities in the decision making process. The status of the “cooperative society of collective interest” adopted in France in 2002 followed the 1991 Italian and 1998 Portuguese models of social cooperatives that bring together “salaried” members, paid skilled workers employed in the services and “voluntary” members contributing to the production of the services. Socially oriented co-operatives appeared in Spain at the same time. The general law of 1999 refers to social-service co-operatives providing education, health care and integration services as well as other social needs not covered by the market economy. On a regional level, one can find mixed co-operatives for social integration in Catalonia and the Basque country and co-operatives for social integration in the region of Valencia.

In summary, social enterprises can be described as those types of enterprises whose function includes the delivery of socially useful services for the benefit of the community as a whole. The credibility of social enterprises derives from the fact that they are rooted in the perspective of a civil and solidarity-based economy. Their economic activity is embedded, a concepts that is central to the work of social-economists K. Polanyi (1944) and M. Granovetter (1985). They are in other words, illustrative of economic activities that are in agreement with the principles of justice and equality. Initiative and solidarity are reconciled since individuals are uniting voluntarily to undertake joint action that will create economic activity and jobs, while simultaneously forging a new social solidarity and reinforcing social cohesion.

A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE: THE PLURAL ECONOMY

The dominant vision of economy is a restrictive one in which social progress and environmental quality improvements are linked to the results of the market economy. Belief in such a link is common to many liberals and social democrats, although they often draw contradictory conclusions from it. This

can have several perverse effects: it gives rise to a type of growth that compartmentalizes the problems of employment, social cohesion and citizenship. In turn, these compartmentalized problems generate functional responses that are powerless to addressing the pathologies of actual experiences within their spheres.

The Three Poles of Economy

To avoid reproducing these pathologies of the actual experience of employment, social cohesion and citizenship related problems, it is necessary to go beyond the truncated vision of a limited market economy and adopt a more extensive definition of the economy, a definition that distinguishes three poles.

- The market economy is an economy in which goods and services are produced based on the motivation of material interest, with the distribution of goods and services being entrusted to the market, which arrives at the price that brings supply and demand into balance so as to arrive at the exchange of goods and services. The relationship between supply and demand is established contractually, based on an interest calculation that allows economy processes to proceed autonomously and unrelated to other non-market social relations.
- The non-market economy is an economy in which the production and distribution of goods and services is entrusted to organizations and processes governed by the welfare state. It is not the market but another economic principle, the principles of redistribution that is mobilized to provide citizens with individual rights, and based on these rights to the benefit they receive from social security, welfare or emergency assistance for those who belong to the most disadvantaged groups within society. The public service organized inside the welfare state is defined by a delivery of goods or services involving a redistributive dimension, generally from the rich to the poor, from the active to the inactive, and so forth. The rules governing this redistribution process are spelled out by public authorities that are subject to democratic control.
- The non-monetary economy is an economy in which production and distribution of goods and services depend on reciprocity. Reciprocity is a relationship established between groups or persons through mutual benefits that only acquire meaning if participants decide to establish a social link that allows them to interact. The non-monetary economy constitutes an original form of economic action and is based on the concept of the gift as an elementary social fact; it calls for a counter-gift

that takes the paradoxical form of an obligation through which the group or person who received the gift exercises a certain freedom. In fact, the recipient is encouraged to give in return but is not subject to any external constraint or control that would compel him/her to do so: the decision is up to the recipient. The concept of the gift is not therefore synonymous with altruism and the absence of a payment. It is a complex mixture of disinterestedness and self-interest. The reciprocity cycle is different from a market exchange relationship because it is inseparable from human relationships that also invariably bring a desire for recognition and power into play. Reciprocal exchange is also distinct from the redistributive exchange, because it is not imposed by a central authority. To some extent, the household economy can be considered the fruit of a form of reciprocity limited to the family group. The principle of household administration which consists of producing for one's own use, providing for the needs of one's 'natural' affiliation group can be understood as a particular form of reciprocity.

The Heuristic Relevance of the Distinctions Between the Poles

The conceptualization of the three types or three poles of economic interaction preserves the market economy from potential mystification and helps reconstitute the complexity of the forms of production and distribution of goods and services. It reveals, among other things, that the market economy is built on a patriarchal order where 80 percent of personal care activities continue to be performed by women in a household economy that is part of the non-monetary economy and ignored by the statistics and measures of the "official" market-economy. Measurement of this unpaid work, however, is an essential condition for making it less elastic, more equally distributed, more appreciative of women's contributions to society and its infrastructure systems and more reflective of its proper value. Indeed, far from being the sole creators of wealth, market production and its organizations of private sector businesses benefit significantly from the many forms of learning acquired by their work force in the household economy. They thus inherit "social capital" (see R. D. Putnam 1993), or symbolic and cultural resources whose strength depends on the richness of the relationships formed and sustained in families and the neighborhoods (O'Hara 1997, 1998).

While the market economy is dependent on the non-monetary economy, the tertiarization of production activities also accentuates the interdependence between the market and non-market economies. The growing importance of service relationships, extending far beyond the services sector,

makes the level of intangible investment a significant factor in the success or failure of the market economy. A significant portion of these intangible investments depends on the public sector. The quality of primary, secondary and post secondary education as well as continuing education and the availability and vitality of intellectual exchange networks, for example, becomes a competitive advantage. Apart from these creative services, the market economy also relies heavily on redistributive services. For example, there has been ample proof that large-scale industrial agriculture is the most highly subsidized form of agriculture. According to the European Commission one quarter of agricultural production that takes place in the most productive, most modern and richest farms requires three quarters of the EU's agricultural subsidies. As redistributive services cease or become counterproductive, social cohesion is undermined as well.

The contradiction or incompatibility between market and non-market economies thus is more a matter of rhetoric than of facts. High value-added companies are not only dependent on communities and other non-market economic entities they invariably rely on public investment, public procurement and preferential loans, while major industries (aerospace, automobile, steel...) are largely dependent on political choices and the logic of state power. The non-market economy too cannot only be viewed simply as a drain on the market economy. Its support of consumptive activities is undeniable. In France, for example, 12 to 13 million people receive welfare benefits or other social support payments; 7 to 8 million people live on the guaranteed minimum income that French citizens receive as basic income support; and fully 45 percent of adult residents in metropolitan France maintain a living standard above poverty level simply due to the resources they receive through social support programs. These figures show that, despite growing pressures to reduce social support programs to secure the competitiveness of market economic activities in light of growing globalization pressures, France has so far maintained a relatively high level of redistribution compared to the United States.

As Veltz (1998) argues, "in reality, the advanced market economy can only function by mobilising all kinds of non-market social resources. It is obviously based on an enormous accumulation of material and intangible collective infrastructures (physical facilities, education, health, etc.), an accumulation which is often "forgotten" by the private players in our countries. They rediscover its decisive importance, by contrast, in zones where these socialised supports are deficient. But the contemporary economy also mobilises many forms of local resources in depth, facilitating the convergence of action and representation. This is where the territory takes on the full

magnitude of its role, as the reservoir of skills and mutual confidence among the players, allowing the reinforcement of learning.”

In short, if one analyzes economic flows, one cannot seriously defend the representation of the market economy as the only source of prosperity for an entire society. What is called for instead is a perspective of the economy that includes the market, but is not limited to it. In other words, a plural economy (OECD 1996) in which the market is one of the components that, while major, is in no way the sole producer of wealth (Passet 1995). Without underestimating the role of the market economy, nor proposing a false symmetry among the three economic poles, it is possible to put forward the hypothesis that the combinations of these poles are political constructs, changing with each socio-historical period.

In a plural economy, the civil and solidarity-based economy may appear as an economy that is not dependent on the market economy’s performance. It may be perceived as a participant in the creation and more equitable distribution of wealth, while generating linkages between the three economic poles. These linkages do not rely on the dependencies inherent in the household economy but are supported by voluntary commitments to the public space that surrounds issues related to everyday life. People associate freely with each other to pool their actions and contribute to the creation of economic activities and jobs, while strengthening social cohesion through new social relations of solidarity. The civil and solidarity-based economy can thus revitalize the political link and consolidate the social fabric while creating jobs, but it cannot be made the instrument of employment without losing its substance. Its mission is not to become the cure for unemployment or other failures of the market economy, but to facilitate relationships between paid and volunteer work in a context that makes users, workers and volunteers the participants in collectively designed services.

CONCLUSION

The initiatives that have taken place during the last quarter of the twentieth century in France are evidence of the rebirth of nineteenth century-style associations, with their insistence on economic action through solidarity. Accompanied by the development of relational services, civil and solidarity-based economies can be broadly defined as a perspective centered on activities contributing to the democratization of the economy and arising from a public engagement in civil society. History has isolated social economics from other social movements. The solidarity-based economy perspective as well as the current circumstances pave the way for a constructive dialogue to take place,

particularly as anti-globalization movements are eager to combine their criticism with practical propositions for another kind of globalization. This change is paralleled by a beginning of public recognition. But a stable legitimacy will never be retained unless the question of the political nature of the economy is raised. The aim must be to switch from the dominant conception of a market society to the conception of a plural economy, that means, an economy extending beyond the realm of the market to include several other economic concepts. In a globalization process driven by the neo-liberal utopia of a market society, the situation seems obviously difficult. The future will probably depend heavily on the ability to increase cooperation between the institutionalized social economy and the initiatives influenced by the solidarity-based economy perspective, together with a capacity to improve the relations with social movements and public bodies.

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