

Editorial

Viva security!

The current obsession with security is poisoning our lives (cf. article by Romain Biever overleaf). And to make matters worse, we are asking for more of it! According to the proponents of liberal values, greater freedom to make some workers redundant and to recruit others would help to create jobs, whilst the humanists claim that such a system could only work if it were underpinned by a series of safety nets.

So what do we really want? If we refer to Wikipedia (cf. www.wikipedia.org), then we will see that it is possible to draw a distinction between several types of approach to security:

«Security is a state of mind enjoyed by a person who feels at ease and confident. It is the feeling, rightly or wrongly, that one is sheltered from any source of danger; it is a combination of a sense of calm, confidence, serenity, tranquillity, peace of mind, assurance, safety». This is something to which the majority of people aspire. However, we must not confuse it with an approach based on law and order.

«The focus on **law and order** is a tendency displayed by society or by an authority to accord an excessive amount of priority to the physical security of part or of the whole of the country or of a social group, often with scant regard for individual freedoms. In the most extreme cases, this may even lead to the creation of a dictatorship, when the fight against the real or imagined source of insecurity is instrumentalised by the powers that be in order to justify the introduction of a particularly repressive regime».

The hysteria that surrounds security is primarily designed to defend the material interests of part of the population. Efforts to defend the general interest are now being overtaken by an approach based on the defence of only certain sections of society. The majority of the big media players are feeding this feeling of insecurity and, as is always the case, it is those that are in the strongest position that are benefiting the most from this situation.

Capitalism is based on getting the highest possible return from financial capital. The workforce has become an adjustable variable element in this approach. The more flexible it is, the more it can be adjusted. The social cost of this flexibility, of course, is a feeling of uncertainty and a fear of what tomorrow may bring. There is a real fear of falling into a state of abject misery. Today this affects 15% of the EU population and 18% in the United Kingdom (source: Eurostat), a country that has chosen to embrace deregulation and a system that provides lower levels of redistribution and remains a country that is often referred to as being a model. Work is no guarantee of prosperity. Indeed, there are an increasing number of poor workers in Europe. The lack of job security is one of the determining factors of poverty amongst the workforce.

This feeling of social insecurity feeds this fantasy of insecurity in a general sense. Solidarity is the only way of fighting against this feeling of insecurity. It goes without saying that a job for everyone may be the prime aim of this form of solidarity, but only if we are talking about decent jobs. This, in turn, serves to generate confidence and... a feeling of security!

Eric LAVILLUNIERE

Forthcoming events:

Grenoble (Fr) – 1 and 2 June – *VIIth international meeting of the Inter-university network for the social and solidarity-based economy: "what is the future of the social and solidarity-based economy in Europe?"*
www.iep-grenoble.fr

Roanne (Fr) – 23 June – *GRIL Study Day: «Conveying the utopian message: promoting the solidarity-based economy at local, national and international level»*
www.inees.org (section events)

Interview with Dr. Susanne Elsen on the role and perception of the solidarity-based economy in Germany

Susanne Elsen is a Professor at the University of Applied Sciences (Fachhochschule) in Munich and member of the board of INEES

There is currently not a great deal of public debate regarding the notion of the «solidarity-based economy», despite the fact that we are seeing an increasing number of publications on this subject by German authors and that there has been a European master's course for some time now in Munich on the «Development of the local community and economy». The debate on the third pillar (the intermediary sector between the public and private sector) is present within economic development planning, the social economy and, more recently, in discussions on «citizens' commitment». However, it is always considered as a social, rather than socio-economic, action. A certain number of experts in the area of social policy and socio-economic activities related to practice, education and research are striving to promote a public debate on this subject, even though it is still not sufficiently relevant in terms of its practical implementation and policies.

The problem is that at the moment there is a tendency gaining ground both in Germany and Europe that is moving away from the «social market economy» towards a purely market-driven economy. This is happening even though the European Constitution commits itself, in article 1.3, to a «highly competitive social market economy» and it is fair to say that this avowed objective cannot conceal an insurmountable contradiction. After all, the article makes reference to an economy that is «highly competitive». On the international market, the ability to compete depends, on the one hand, upon the possibility of being able to offer the best investments at a world level for transferable capital and, on the other hand, the possibility of being a leader on the export market as a result of being able to keep costs as low as possible. These two factors go hand-in-hand with savings made in the environmental and social areas, deregulation, privatisation and the cutting back of public infrastructures that are at the service of the citizens and communities. The structures that currently exist in Germany also argue against the development of a solidarity-based economy. Here are some of the reasons for this:

- A civic sense that, for the time being at least, still lacks the assurance and power of initiative required to develop a third pillar,
- State structures within which the trade unions, chambers, charity organisations, cooperative societies and interest groups are using their influence to hold back change rather than to encourage it,
- A powerful and unilateral market orientation which is focussed on the large companies, thus leading to a failure to identify with the ideas of a solidarity-based economy,
- A lack of coordination between the solidarity-based economy initiatives that tend to get lost, just about everywhere, in efforts made to exert influence and to be as competitive as possible in order to obtain public funding.

There is no real point in public funding being increasingly used to support «local economy» initiatives, since these projects are no longer part of a process designed to promote sustainable alternatives. Instead, these initiatives now act as structures that are responsible for promoting the local economy or employment policies designed to promote «employability» and it is certainly no longer possible to associate these initiatives with the philosophy and practical implementation of the solidarity-based economy.

However, at the same time, we have also seen the creation of a series of networks that have adopted a civic approach and that adhere to a democratic philosophy regarding socio-economic and ecological development. These networks have organised conferences and workshops and, in particular, have launched training, research and development projects. What they are trying to do is to fill in the gaps, to identify common objectives and to give concrete expression to the solidarity-based economy.

At the moment, we are also seeing the appearance of more and more small social and production cooperative companies that are a response to specific critical situations and which, through their work, are now

Point of view

Security – conviviality – Society's choice?

It is quite clear that security is on the agenda across the globe. Those that are looking for security through their God(s) are terrorising one another. The solidarity that binds together the peoples of the world is being eroded. This is almost inevitable.

The rules and regulations that have been drawn up to govern world trade invite everyone to join in the battle. This, of course, has a harmful effect on harmonious developments between potential economic actors. Large groups of men, women and children are excluded from a decent level of participation in the life of a community. A succession of regressive laws is being imposed upon them in order to ensure that one part of the population may live in complete security.

The world is divided into enclaves that play host, in certain areas, to those that aspire to a life in which their security is guaranteed, whilst those that are considered to be a potential threat to this security are grouped together elsewhere, in other enclaves. Security hysteria is the domain of only a minority of people at worldwide level, but it is gaining ground, particularly amongst people in the western world.

Contagious diseases and epidemics that, of course, come from other parts of the world, are a threat to all of us in our respective countries! The desire to prevent the spread of disease leads us to be severe on everything that seems foreign to us. Prophylaxis and hysteria, two natural bedfellows, exert an increasingly strong influence upon security needs, leaving us virtually incapable of expressing a sensible opinion on our daily community lives. This need for security is spreading like a voracious illness within our communities.

The logic behind this split along the lines of security-based considerations is becoming so omnipresent and so obsessive in our daily lives, that questions such as whether or not one should eat frog's legs or be a smoker or non-smoker are now dealt with as if the answer to them can act as a sedative for our existentialist fears. The hysteria surrounding security is now overtaking unconditional solidarity. There is no doubt that fear is the enemy of solidarity.

But is there any need to be afraid? And what should we be afraid of? We ourselves devise the rules that govern the way in which we live our lives together; this is the system of laws and conventions according to which we organise and manage the way in which our societies function on this planet that we share with one another.

But do we have the most appropriate set of rules possible?

Apparently not, since people are afraid. These rules are used to build walls that are supposed to protect us and yet, paradoxically, they only serve to feed the hatred and fears they are designed to combat. Fear is a bad counsellor and security often proves itself to be treacherous.

Have we been condemned to live within this infernal spiral?

The answer has to be no, since we bear responsibility for organising the way in which we live our lives together. This is at the very heart of our democratic values.

So what do we really want? Do we really wish to continue to hide behind these stressful reflections that feed upon themselves, or would we prefer to expose ourselves to the risks inherent in freedom? The freedom to make choices, to act, to do things, at the risk of sharing with others, rather than falling into the trap of being competitive and jealous? On the other hand, we would also be running the worthwhile risk of rediscovering solidarity and conviviality that seems to be disappearing. We would also then be able to take the political risk of promoting the solidarity-based economy

Romain Bieber - President of INEES
 Managing Director of Objectif Plein Emploi - Luxembourg

INEES is a partner of the Objectif Plein Emploi network that is going to Nantes to share its practices and hopes to meet managers of solidarity-based enterprises who wish to work on management methods in the plural economy.

Interview with Dr. Susanne Elsen (continued)

taking up a position within the sector of the solidarity-based economy. However, they tend to act in isolation, totally disconnected from existing networks.

The aim of the various movements in Germany must be to anchor the solidarity-based economy in civic, economic and political life. The solidarity-based economy follows a different logic to that followed by the dominant, profit-driven economy. It has a different image of what is human and a different notion of the economy and of society, it follows other principles of coordination and other ways of acting and its goal is to bring about a sustainable system of management at a social, economic and ecological level. This requirement should be used as a criterion for all added value and the allocation of profits. After all, it is not a problem of seeking profit, but rather one of knowing how to make a profit and how to use it.

There is no doubt that in Germany at the moment there is a significant degree of interest in the models that have been put forward as an alternative to the present economic model and this interest is displayed within totally different social groups. It is now a question of seeking out allies, particularly amongst the social movements, so as to reinforce the idea and the practical implementation of the solidarity-based economy, based upon long-forgotten traditions and good practice that has been neglected in the German-speaking countries.

Compiled for INEES by Christina Schürr (OPE – Lux.)
 The complete interview is available, in German, at www.inees.org – in the newsletter section.

Les Ecosolies – Nantes les 9, 10 et 11 Juin «Working together to build a solidarity-based area that is open to the world»

Les Ecosolies: both an event and an association

An association that brings together the actors involved in the social and solidarity-based economy (SSBE): the many local community structures and also the larger organisations such as the cooperative banks or the mutuals in the healthcare sector. It was created as a response to the fact that the SSBE is not something that the general public knows well and it has the aim of making as many people as possible aware of not only the values defended by the social and solidarity-based economy, but also the diversity of its structures and various projects. It has launched a range of actions to promote the SSBE, culminating in the achievement of their main objective, namely to make June the month of the social and solidarity-based economy.

This national and international event will be the largest of its kind ever organised in France and probably in Europe. In total, more than 300 local actors are working together to create this month of the social and solidarity-based economy and it is expected that there will be 30,000 participants. Several events will be taking place throughout the Pays de la Loire region, including:

- **The main event in Nantes on 9, 10 and 11 June:** a mass meeting in the very centre of Nantes. Serving as a mirror image of the social and solidarity-based economy, as a festival, meeting place and forum for the presentation of initiatives, this central event will be a combination of exhibitions, debates, markets for organic and fair trade products, concerts... A central area has been reserved for the presentation of European initiatives (exchanges of practices, debates, exhibitions...) with the participation, in particular, of the REVES, INEES, OPE-Lux networks and of other foreign delegations.

- **From 12 to 30 June 2006,** an itinerant exhibition will enable people to discover the initiatives undertaken by some one hundred local actors, as it travels around the main towns in the Pays de la Loire region. Events and open days will also take place across the 24 districts of the city of Nantes.



In order to participate, to host a stand and for all other types of information, see: www.ecosolies.fr or call: + 33 (0) 240 893 369