



Xth meetings of the University Network for Social and Solidarity Economy (RIUESS)

Luxembourg, 3/4 June 2010

Developing a theoretical framework for social and solidarity economy: in view of an alternative model for society A social and solidarity economy theory for a different social model.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Over a period of ten years the meetings of the University Network for Social and Solidarity Economy and many scientific events have dealt with a variety of topics that have increased our understanding of the various challenges, areas and problems facing the SSE (visit our website at www.riuess.org).

Despite the amount of research on and publications concerning SSE, there is still no agreement even internally as to its shape or foundation. By comparison with traditional theories and analyses, this is certainly a scientific weakness.

The problem needs to be resolved and the tenth anniversary of RIUESS presents an opportunity to do so. We need to draw on what we have learned from our work over the years while laying the foundations for the next ten years. Without agreement on what social and solidarity economy is and where disagreements about it lie, researchers into SSE could dissipate or lose their object.

This is the aim of the meeting to be held at the University of Luxembourg 3/4 June 2010. Identifying the foundations is essential if SSE is to be a credible alternative to prevailing economic thought. Without anticipating the outcome - SSE concepts need considerable discussion among its various schools of thought - SSE is increasingly distancing itself from the prevailing, itself controversial, model. We must now look at the true similarities and differences between the concepts.

We are proposing that this should be done by taking two lines that will be sub-divided into six workshops, since a solid theoretical basis for SSE must rely on both clearly defined essential concepts and consideration of its epistemology, whose very complexity might well be an inherent characteristic.

A SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY THEORY FOR A DIFFERENT SOCIAL MODEL

I) Basic concepts

The main focus will be on the three main concepts underlying SSE: economic, because SSE is essentially grounded in production and circulation; political, even though for SSE this is an area that gives rise to constant controversy; and ethical because SSE aims to embrace man in his entirety.

A) SSE, production and trade - the public and private economies?

The market economy is today indisputably the dominant economic model at both practical and theoretical levels. Despite the battles raging within the heart of current orthodoxy, its position is solid and generally accepted. Profits are vital to the accumulation of productive and financial capital and individualism is vital to acquisition and market mechanisms.

The public economy presents a different face by emphasising the role of the State. Although constantly retreating before the onslaught of dominant economic and financial liberalism, it continues to represent aims and ideals that are fundamentally different from those of the market economy. The present challenge to the limits of public policy and its areas of involvement highlights the discussions between the upholders of the various economic views on the purpose and scope of public authority.

In the case of SSE the scenario is entirely different. SSE has gone through a number of phases and directions that with a number of different variations and names all have a more or less firm foothold on all five continents. After their initial economic outbursts, the co-operative and mutual sectors have gained institutional recognition and their own identities. But a large number of subsequent changes totally muddled these waters.

Firstly, not-for-profit associations have now entered the economic field, leading to a more or less happy reconsideration of social economy as a concept with the aim of collecting institutions with previously different purposes under one single roof and name. A major hit with researchers and politicians, the players themselves see the reviewed concept as unreliable and empty. The new line was immediately challenged by the solidarity economy current which proclaimed similar values but highlighted its differences by insisting on the political nature of entrepreneurial activity, overhauled the concepts of solidarity and connection with the public interest and rejected the institutional criterion as being proper to a different concept altogether. The attempt over the last ten years to link the social and the solidarity economies so as to reduce differences has had some success but owing to the lack of any theoretic basis, it cannot do more than paper over the cracks and at best relies on concepts that cannot be said to have the same meaning for all.

Beyond these two lines, there are the SSE third sector and social benefit (charities and voluntary non-profit organisations redistributing wealth downwards towards the poorest in the English-speaking world) and 3rd economic pillar (local development e.g. Canadian community development and Luxembourg's solidarity economy) approaches.

Finally, in various countries and ranging from charitable associations to social entrepreneurship via social co-operatives, more or less subsidised systems generally classed within SSE have been set up to deal with unemployment.

Despite their differences, do these systems together constitute one common whole that can be used as a basis for a new form of society? And how would it be organised?

B) SSE and politics: choosing the democratic model

The relationship between the social and solidarity economy and politics is not without its ambiguities and cracks tend to appear, depending on your definition of SSE. The first thing to note is the potential interlinking of the public and private sectors. Historically, the most committed supporters of co-operatives and mutuals have also been committed to politics. This is certainly true today where militant associationism is concerned, although here political commitment is primarily local in scale. Solidarity economy movements might seem in rebellion against this commitment (their own being possibly more to new political structures) but this indicates less a lack of interest than a trend towards other means of expressing citizenship.

Going beyond this rather superficial phenomenon, we must look at the importance SSE wishes to give to politics within its structures and actions. Co-operative republics, a French concept with alternative but similar forms within France, came to mean members' aim of deeply transforming all social relationships by developing a co-operative model that would cover society in its entirety. This view was abandoned after the Second World War (at least in Northern Europe) and co-operatives and mutuals pursuing a more modest ambition of establishing themselves despite the predominance of the liberal model, associations seeking to gain a firm economic footing.

At the same time in South America, SSE became part of the democratic debate where this was possible or formed part of the resistance to totalitarianism as an alternative to capitalism.

Politics is now raising new questions about what citizenship means in our modern societies. As political decision-making methods evolve, they are increasingly encompass what we call "civil society". We must therefore determine what SSE's role is to be in this discussion, assuming it can be established how (or in what way) SSE will ally the political and economic natures of its actions. One traditional form of action is participation in public life. The practice of democracy lies at the heart of public life, educating its members in political democracy. But participation is subject to rules that are themselves governed by the reality of political life.

Does this mean that SSE is no longer a utopia? And if so, what is its political philosophy and how does it see political democracy?

C) SSE and ethics: the subjective and the collective

The social and solidarity economy does not just raise questions about the system, it also and primarily looks at the individual, the subjective. Where liberalism focuses on homo oeconomicus who makes rational choices, SSE considers the relevance of the perfect calculator/optimiser model that lies at the heart of traditional macro-economics. There is good reason to believe that this is a more solid subject than would first appear, one that reacts to more than just market prices.

This question is typical of the problems involved in localising SSE. The associationism that lies at the basis of SSE is traditionally attributed to Proudhon, known for his libertarian and self-management theories. Within SSE, associationism takes the form of distrust in the State, as the social and solidarity economy prefers to organise itself rather than to submit to State governance. Proudhon also advocated a society whose organisation is based on the individual via a multiplicity of contracts. Yet SSE is also (primarily) known for its opposition to individualism and its support of the collective ideal (the community). While there is no question of reducing individualism to egotism, the ambivalence about individualism does cast doubt on the clarity of SSE's essential concept of the subjective.

The attachment to Proudhon is an example only. Similar comments could be made about affiliations with Fourier, Owen or Leroux whose criticisms of liberalism and their alternatives to it are based on original views of the subjective and its place in society. The views are not necessarily convergent and cannot be included without mutual contradiction within the social and solidarity economy we know today.

Two antiquous concepts deserve our attention as a way of measuring present equilibriums: solidarity and emancipation. In the case of solidarity, SSE thinking insists on the fact that it is not only the foundation of commitment to SSE but also that it is generated by action within its organisations. Solidarity as a theory has been sufficiently misused, including by SSE thinkers, to require a more serious definition. This could be useful in scientific relations between individual and the collective and when defining the individual. It might also clarify the differences between SSE concepts, depending on whether solidarity is viewed as internal or external to the reference group. The link between solidarity and responsibility could also be reviewed from the same perspective, especially since public opinion and some management science works seem vague about the distinction between "durability" and "responsibility".

Research into emancipation was undertaken when we started and more recently. It would be tempting to look here for an answer to the apparent divergences between those in favour of an alternative political project and the reformists, by viewing the emancipation of the individual as a common goal. This would be approached at a general, including spiritual, level, with SSE providing a suitable framework for the whole.

Sociology provides another line by looking at organisations' actual practices. This shows the gaps between the institutional framework and the actual behaviour of members and brings us back to one key, controversial question: should SSE be defined in terms of its institutions or its practices? This is not a new question - but it has never been answered.

II) Epistemological foundation of SSE

Epistemology as a term is difficult to manage. Yet to the extent that SSE is both a field of action and a utopia, it is the domain of both those who bring it to life and of the thinkers who imagine it or theorise it. It is not a question that can be avoided. Naturally this leads to the question of the relationships between SSE and academic disciplines. But we must also consider SSE itself. Theoretically, this means looking at the disciplines with which it is linked. Practically, this means how SSE in action interacts with the theory it creates.

D) SSE and other disciplines

Although the three above characteristics of SSE do not fall into any clearly defined discipline, as human activities they nevertheless are an area

for study by the human and social sciences. SSE is not just a theory: it is also, and probably primarily, experience and practice.

The scientific discussion of SSE is bringing in increasing numbers of researchers from various academic disciplines such as political science, economics, sociology, management, psycho-sociology, ethnology, law, philosophy, pedagogy, communications etc.

The first discipline that springs to mind as regards the development of SSE research is probably economics, since SSE practices raise questions about the rigid concepts underlying basic tenets such as the market or currency. The same applies to the sociology of organisations, if we look at e.g. the concept of the solidarity economy company and governance (networking, production, values, professions etc.). Or the law, whose contribution would be in the area of the legitimacy of socio-economic action using legal principles other than private property.

It would therefore be as well to consider what SSE owes to these disciplines at the practical as well as the theoretical levels. This is not about listing all the concepts and mechanisms it may have borrowed from them but about giving a more global assessment of the links between them, the currents within each related discipline and the uniformity these different influences have created.

Conversely, we might wonder about the impact SSE has had on the scientific disciplines it draws from. Beginning with the principle that SSE is increasingly a current of thought, should we not recognise its impact on other disciplines during interaction? SSE's contribution to research stems from its development of concepts and methodologies that traditional disciplines have, or might, appropriate to themselves. This is particularly true in the case of applied research, which no other discipline has pushed so far, or organised to form consistent theories.

Another main question is the scientific status of SSE itself. Going beyond the interest it might present to traditional disciplines, we must ask what its epistemological status is: is it a new, developing discipline or a meeting of other disciplines around one single object or set of objects? Is it an area of study for a number of different academic disciplines or is it a solid body of concepts and homogeneous scientific methods that together form a separate scientific discipline? Using the study classification method common to a number of disciplines, we must establish whether SSE is a multi-disciplinary approach (parallel studies), an inter-disciplinary approach (intersecting studies), or a trans-disciplinary approach (convergent studies).

E) The historical roots of SSE

SSE is not the only alternative offered to capitalism and economic liberalism. Over the last few years, as fissures have appeared in the market economy and the limitations of the demonstrations and predictions of mainstream economists have come to light, Keynesian and Marxist theories have resurfaced. At the same time, new trans-disciplinary heterodoxies have appeared (economics of conventions, cognitive economics, regulatory theory, institutionalism, socio-economics etc.) to accompany or respond to social challenges (degrowth movements). All heterodoxies consequently have links or connections with SSE that need investigation. But we also need to move beyond the view of SSE as an alternative to the market and State models. In other words, we need to look at how independent SSE thinking is and how influential it is in reality.

While the reason for the dominance of the liberal economy must remain at least in part a mystery, a number of writers have built equally credible theoretic bases that are today of acute topicality. Building a solid foundation for SSE means finding bases that despite their diversities are convergent, that render it durable and that in other words continue to generate current and future experience.

F) SSE - testing the theory in practice

Territory, social cohesion, prosperity and new indicators, governance. These are the areas in which SSE is seeking new legitimate reasons for its inclusion in the field of the sciences so that it can form part of the political scene.

SSE is a naturally territorial and "local" economy (in the sense that it links the individual with the society in which he lives), characteristics that may now enable it to play a new and more legitimate role. SSE has a long tradition of partnerships: the interaction of different resources gives better results. It revitalises politics in the sense that expertise supports but does not replace decision-making. It creates social cohesion and even wealth so long as it is measured using appropriate indicators that take account of population well-being.

The current international crisis means that all diagnostics point to SSE's criticisms of the capitalist system but has there been any significant increase in the attraction of SSE's arguments and practices? Should we not be looking at the relationships between theory and practice? Is researchers' scientific interest in SSE a sign of recognition or mummification? What do SSE players expect from scientific research and do they find it in the results? What can SSE rely on when seeking legitimacy for its actions and for the gains it contributes? What tools, references, training and communication methods should be used and to what end?

NB:

Since the lack of clarity about the theoretical bases for SSE is to some extent caused by the open differences among various SSE currents, the Xth RIUESS meetings on 3/4 June in Luxembourg will be preceded by a working meeting attended by a number of recognised different theoreticians of the social and solidarity economy who will discuss their thoughts under the critical eyes of a number of traditional thinkers.

Attending alongside RIUESS members at the University of Marne-la-Vallée at the beginning of February will therefore be:

- Third sector- Helmut Anheier, Professor of Sociology, University of Heidelberg;
- Quebec School of Social Economics - Marie Bouchard, Professor of the Department of Organisation and Human Resources, ESG UQÀM Montreal;
- South American solidarity economics - Jose Luis Coraggio, economist, School of Economics, University of Buenos Aires (UBA);
- Social enterprises - Jacques Defourny, Professor of Social Economy and Comparative Economic Systems, HEC Management School, University of Liège, Director of the Centre of Social Economics and President of the EMES network;
- Social economy - Jean-François Draperi, Senior Lecturer in Sociology and Director of the Centre for Social Economy, Employment and Society (CESTES), CNAM Paris;
- Community development - Susanne Elsen, Professor and Head of the Faculty of Applied Social Sciences in Munich;
- Solidarity economy - Jean-Louis Laville, Professor of Service Relations, National Arts and Crafts Conservatoire (CNAM - Paris);
- Cooperatives in Europe - Rainer Schlüter, SSE representative;

who will be questioned by:

- Regulation theory - Robert Boyer (not confirmed), economist at CEPREMAP, Director of Studies, EHESS;
- Anti-utilitarian movement in the social sciences (MAUSS) - Alain Caillé, Professor of Sociology, University of Paris X, Co-Director of SOPHI-APOL (ex-GEODE), Political Sociology, Philosophy and Anthropology Workshop, University of Paris-X Nanterre;
- Sociology - Philippe Corcuff, Senior Lecturer in Political Sciences, Institute of Political Sciences, Lyons - CERLIS;
- Degrowth movement - (to be confirmed);
- NGO development - Xavier Ricard, Director for International Partnerships, Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development (CCFD);
- Philosophy - Patrick Viveret, conseiller maître (senior magistrate) at the French Court of Auditors.

the Scientific Committee:

- Edith Archambault, Emeritus Professor, University of Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne;
- Geneviève Azam, Senior Lecturer in Economic Sciences, University of Toulouse le Mirail;
- Bernard Billaudot, Emeritus Professor of Economics, University Pierre Mendès France, Grenoble;
- Danièle Demoustier, Senior Lecturer in Economic Sciences, Institute of Political Studies, Grenoble;
- Bernard Eme, Professor of Sociology, University of Lille 1;
- Patrick Loquet, Réseau 21, Senior Lecturer in Law, University of Valenciennes et du Hainaut-Cambrésis;
- Carmen Parra, Professor of Social and Solidarity Economy, University Abat Oliva CEU, Barcelona;
- Francesca Petrella, Senior Lecturer in Economic Sciences, Faculty of Economic Sciences and Management, University of the Mediterranean;
- Nadine Richez-Battesti, Senior Lecturer in Economic Sciences, Faculty of Economic Sciences and Management, University of the Mediterranean;
- Jean-Michel Servet, Professor at the University Institute of Development Studies (IUED), Geneva.

the Steering Committee:

- Jérôme Blanc, Senior Lecturer in Economic Sciences, University Lumière Lyon 2;
- Gilles Caire, Senior Lecturer in Economic Sciences, University of Poitiers;
- Josette Combes, solidarity economy consultant, Course Manager, University of Toulouse le Mirail;
- Eric Dacheux, Professor of Information Sciences and Communication, University Blaise Pascal (Clermont-Ferrand);
- Laurent Fraisse, sociology researcher, LISE, CNAM, Paris;
- Laurent Gardin, Senior Lecturer in Sociology, University of Valenciennes and Hainaut Cambrésis;
- Patrick Gianfaldoni, Senior Lecturer in Economic Sciences, University of Avignon and Pays de Vaucluse;
- Pascal Glémoin, Professor of Social and Solidarity Economy, ESSCA-Catholic University of the West;
- David Hiez, Professor of Law, University of Luxembourg.
- Eric Lavillunière, Head of Management, European Institute for the Solidarity Economy;
- David Vallat, Senior Lecturer in Economic Sciences, University Claude Bernard Lyon 1.

Submission of papers, evaluation and timetable

Selected papers will be put on line and some will be published. Papers will be put on line 15 days before the meeting and in June the best papers will be published. Proposals may be submitted in French or English.

If you wish to submit a paper, please draft a max. 5000- lines letter of intent giving the subject, methodology and theoretical framework, to reach us before 20 January 2010. Since proposals will be assessed on a double blind basis by the Scientific Committee, each must contain the following two separate items:

- an identification page giving the name of the author(s), his/her/their position, the title of the paper and a five-letter acronym;
- the proposal proper, identified by its acronym alone.

Answers will be sent to authors by 15 February.

Final papers must be received before 30 April.

Proposals should be sent to:

riuess.unilu@inees.org (you will be sent a receipt within 8 days, please check your proposal has been sent if you receive no receipt)

Website: www.riuess.org