This background paper has been written at the request of the members of the Coordinating Committee of the Civil Society Mechanism of the Committee for Food Security and others present at the Budapest meeting in December 2011 as a support for the preparation for the FAO Regional Consultations with CSOs and the FAO Regional Conference. It is not an exhaustive analysis of the social and solidarity economy, merely an overview, and certainly an incomplete one at that. The aim is to stimulate discussion and ideas on how Food Sovereignty and Solidarity Economy fit together.

I would like to express my thanks to all those who have helped and supported me in this work, particularly Michael Lewis of the Canadian Centre for Community Renewal for his precious time and discussions and allowing me to read several chapters of his soon-to-be-published book "The Resilience Imperative, cooperative transitions to a steady-state economy", Rob Hopkins, founder of the Transition Town movement for sending me his PhD, Shinya Takeda of Nouminren in Japan for the statistics in Japan, Andrea Calori, President of Urgenci for his help with the GAS networks, Françoise Wautiez for the information she uploads regularly onto Aloe mailing list, Nancy Neamtan of the Chantier de l'Économie Sociale in Quebec and Eric Lavillunière.of INEES in Luxemburg.

Food is a human right, and as such falls into the brief of the United Nations, specifically into that of the FAO. However it is a right that is being eroded in many contexts. The commodification of land and food and the increasingly concentrated ownership of all aspects of the supply chain by a small number of large export-focused, profit-driven corporations is decreasing long-term food security. Reversing this overriding trend is challenging. International rules and power relations favour industrial corporate agriculture (WTO, IMF, etc.). Recent large-scale land acquisitions by Asian and Middle-Eastern countries of agricultural land have been eroding access to land for small-scale family farmers. Industrial, oil-based and environmentally-damaging production processes add to the problem, keeping prices to producers low and using unsustainable production methods. Fair price is a significant problem leading in many countries to chronic operating losses for producers and a lack of decent working conditions and pay for agricultural workers.

The Food Sovereignty movement, arguably the most powerful social movement of our times, is seeking to address these multiple challenges in diverse ways. The work of the food sovereignty movement to diversify, democratise, decentralise and distribute goods and services more fairly is arguably the most significant and vibrant expression of the emerging solidarity economy movement around the world. By necessity, resistance to the policies, powers and principalities that seek to reinforce corporate control of the food system are one strategic component of the agenda.

There is an agreed need to establish alternative systems and distribution to overcome resource grabbing and guarantee access to sustainable healthy food for urban and rural poor alike. Many of the potential answers lie in the scope of the social and solidarity economy.

This brief background paper was requested to examine the social and solidarity economy movement. It tries to address the following questions: What is solidarity economy, and how does it fit together with food sovereignty? What are the specific components of the social and solidarity economy that are shared with food sovereignty and those that complement it? How can solidarity economy be scaled up at global level? If we want to facilitate the creation and consolidation of alternative food systems - and indeed the economy in general - we need to devise a series of actions and policies that have implications for different aspects our lives, and that connect the different dimensions of society and economy. What is important however is to consider that there are a lot of initiatives that concretely act to build a different economy from the mainstream market economy, and that they place the needs of the communities are in the centre of their concerns.

It is interesting to consider the universe of solidarity economy as a series of joined-up ways to connect and reconnect our lives and reconsider the different aspects of society and the economy as a whole. The paper does not pretend to provide all the answers. It mere aims to open the door to looking at some of the key areas mentioned.

Solidarity Economy has cultural and terminology differences but there is a community of shared practice and political project at global level

The history of different countries and cultures has shaped both the practice and the semantics of social and solidarity economy. Whereas solidarity economy is a term most extensively used in Latin countries of Southern Europe and Latin America, it has little resonance in the Northern European countries or North America, where social economy is the preferred term. In many post-communist regimes in Eastern Europe and certain Asian cultures, the word "social" and even "cooperative" can

produce instant resistance to positive practice that already exists in other countries, grounded in fears of history repeating itself. So the issue of terminology is something of a globally unresolved question, although there is an increasing unity in terms of networks and scaling up of certain practice within the solidarity economy movement as a whole. The term solidarity economy distinguishes it from social economy, a field that is generally anchored the large mutual societies and co-operatives whose history goes back to the 19th century. Solidarity economy, is generally organised with statutes also called "sociétés de personnes" in French, is a multi-faceted alternative to both State and market economy of capitalism. A very good analysis and explanatory diagrams by Mike Lewis of Canada can be found at: http://www.socialeconomy-bcalberta.ca/social-economy. The first diagram has also been titled by Mike as "Solidarity Economy, reframing the Agenda".

In Quebec, and to a great extent in Canada and the United States, for other historical reasons, "économie sociale" is the broad equivalent of the solidarity economy as manifested in Southern Europe and Latin America, but with its own cultural specificities. Another term that is sometimes used in English is "solidarity-based economy". Solidarity economy has been also been referred to as "third sector". The Transition Towns movement does not mention solidarity economy, but many of their practices are also those of solidarity economy. A global network of solidarity economy, RIPESS (Réseau intercontinental de promotion de l'économie Sociale et Solidaire: http://www.ripess.org and www.ripessEU.net), was founded in Latin America in Lima in 1996. The name refers to both social and solidarity as an inclusive gesture. This paper does not intend to become involved in the semantic discussions or the perimeters of these definitions. It aims to provide further background reading and illustrate from concrete case studies and recent interviews and documents available on-line how the different existing dimensions of solidarity economy provide concrete alternatives to today's economic crisis and impasse, and how they interface with food issues in particular.

The essential aspect however that cuts across solidarity economy is one of values. It is based on empowerment of civil society, and attempts to achieve a "high road" to a full economic alternative that is as multi-faceted as are the needs and fields of society and the economy.

A great deal of further input, news, books and other documents on solidarity economy are available on the Aloe website, at http://aloe.socioeco.org/page11-news_fr.html, and www.socioeco.org

In October 2011, a major meeting of some 1,200 experts and practitioners of this field was held in Montreal, called FIESS (Forum International de l'Économie Sociale et Solidaire: http://www.fiess2011.org It brought together both experts and practitioners in the various fields of Social and Solidarity economy from around the world. It was organised and hosted by the Chantier de l'Économie Sociale in Montreal. Nancy Neamtan, President and General Director of the Chantier de l'Économie Sociale was the ILO social and solidarity economy reader for 2010; she also acts as Coordinator for the RIPESS Board of Administration.

One of the many outcomes has been the recent visit of the Quebec Minister Lesard, (Ministre des Affaires Municipales, des Régions et de l'Occupation du Territoire – MAMROT- to Belgium, Luxemburg and France, to examine the state and evolution of social and solidarity economy in these countries, from 10th to 18th December 2011.

The 5 excellent background papers written as preparation for the FIESS clearly outline what the Social and Solidarity involve, and how the distributive models of social and solidarity economy provide a genuine alternative to the neo-liberal model. They provide invaluable structured analysis into the various aspects and benefits of social and solidarity economy. These papers have all been written by experts, and any attempt on my part to write a background paper that says more on the subject would be inadequate, plagiarism or pretentious! http://www.fiess2011.org/en/themes. The themes of these papers are: Territory and local development, innovations and collective entrepreneurship, solidarity finance and trade, work and employment and food security and sovereignty. The information is available in three languages (English, French and Spanish).

The interview with Daniel Tygel, executive secretary of the Brazilian Solidarity Economy Forum (www.fbes.org.br/) provides an excellent analysis of what solidarity economy is, and also its benefits http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HVAm_eoy3qo , as well as how it can work and be scaled-up.

This paper will therefore merely make some additional comments and references to other interesting and useful sites, videos or works.

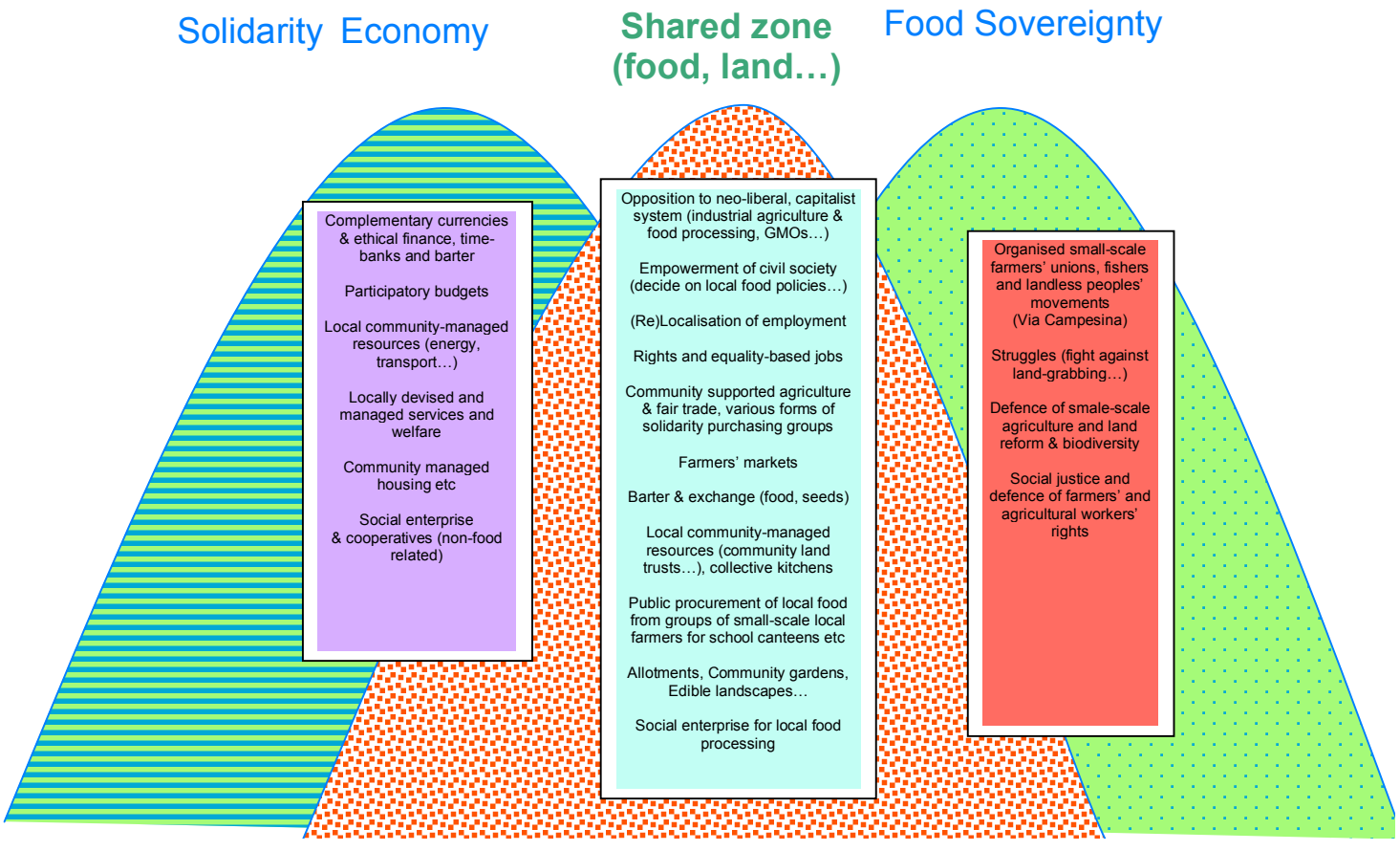
The paper on food deals specifically on the approaches to local food systems that enable effective implementation of food security based on the approach of food sovereignty.

And just as there are cultural differences in terminology, the very definition of food sovereignty implies a right to culturally appropriate food. Indeed alternative food systems, as understood in solidarity economy does not refer to a single, unique system, but to a variety of systems and solutions that are adapted to each country, each culture and context. In Community Supported Agriculture alone, there are many variants, with some groups helping out on the farms on a regular basis, others only visiting once a year. But the principle of solidarity and of shared risk of the consumers with the producers is a constant, an act of solidarity that cuts across cultural difference. More details on Community Supported Agriculture can be found on the Urgenci website and blog (www.urgenci.net and www.blog.urgenci.net) Urgenci is the international CSA network, present at global level. It identifies itself as part of both the Food Sovereignty movement, and as part of the Solidarity economy movement, as building alternative food systems is an integral part of a different economic paradigm. It is a founding member of RIPESS Europe.

Many approaches that exist within the solidarity economy, in the broad sense of the term, have their genesis in the failure of the market economy to meet their needs, and are, at least initially, born from local initiatives. Our challenge in the overall movement is the connection and scaling up of these phenomena. This involves reaching beyond the realm of food and agriculture alone. This implies a change of paradigm, and also of those stakeholders invited to the table. To do so, and to include those dimensions touched on later in this paper will allow us to build a real economic alternative

It clearly outlines all the important aspects of how social and solidarity economy and the food sovereignty movement provide a realistic and alternative response to the industrial agriculture and agribusiness' policies that can only further exacerbate the existing impacts of the current financial and economic crisis on food.

Based on this paper and many other documents (references listed at the end of this paper), I have tried to compile a visualisation of the most important areas where solidarity economy and food sovereignty overlap (*middle zone, red dots*). The diagram also attempts to identify the additional areas where solidarity economy as an overall economic response to the economic, financial and social crisis provides other important dimensions of response to the current crisis (*left-hand zone dark green stripe*), as well as those areas where the food sovereignty movement plays a separate and distinct role that complements the solidarity economy (*right-hand zone, green dots*). It is not perfect, and finance for example is a cross-cutting issue that needs to be represented in all areas. The aim of the diagram is to simplify the visualisation of what is shared or separate. This is, of course open to correction and improvement.



Judith Hitchman, January 2012.

Although both Food Sovereignty and Solidarity Economy are social movements, the Food Sovereignty movement has a far stronger profile; it concentrates on a well-defined area, is highly organised, has very clear communication strategies, and is therefore highly visible and coherent at global level. This results in a very high impact internationally. This is not necessarily the case of solidarity economy or even the RIPESS network, where the various strands have not always come together in a coherent national or international framework.

The recent financial and economic crises have however considerably changed perceptions. Whereas solidarity economy was (wrongly) hitherto perceived as a marginal niche, it is increasingly now considered to have the potential to provide a solution to the current crisis. Both Ecuador and Bolivia have included Solidarity Economy and Food sovereignty in their constitutions. An excellent interview by Anne-Marie Thomazeau on this subject with Jean-Louis Lavillle, one of the leading figures in the French solidarity economy movement can be read at www.viva.presse.fr/La-Bolivie-et-l-Equatoeyont_16297.html

Brazil has a Secretariat for Solidarity Economy, and the FBES (Brazilian Forum for Solidarity Economy) has carried out extensive mapping of solidarity economy projects. The impact of this has led to effective implementation of areas of solidarity economy, as local inhabitants are more aware, and know where to find both goods and services through alternate systems. It is interesting to note that one of the last laws signed by Lula before leaving the Brazilian Presidency now obliges all public institutions to procure a minimum of 30% of their food from local family farms and solidarity economy agricultural cooperatives. Whether this is an attempt to offset the unacceptable fact that many small-scale family farmers are losing their land to industrial agriculture and now growing crops for agrifuels rather than food, is pure speculation on the author's behalf… It is nevertheless a laudable initiative.

In France there has recently been a substantial mapping of solidarity economy projects, and Luxemburg has a Ministry for Solidarity economy, and a very effective network is in place in this country under the auspices of OPE http://www.ope.lu/

National government can, as previously stated, play a key role in supporting solidarity economy. Nevertheless, I would like to add a strong *caveat*. This is only relevant if the conditions of a bottom-up civil society-empowered movement are in place, and if certain fundamentals are respected. The case of Romania, where a law on social economy has recently been introduced includes certain rather alarming features that instrumentalise the true potential. The law enables major corporations and businesses to fund social economy projects as a form of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility). These funds are then tax-exempt. The projects appear not necessarily to be based on genuine empowerment of alternatives, but rather to instrumentalise the "problematic" and "marginalised" sectors of society… An excpetion to this is the important project instigated by the IRIS network, the CRIES (CRIES: Centre de ressources pour les initiatives éthiques et responsables) and supported by the Council of Europe in Timisoara, involving a Territory of co-responsibility. http://ensie.x004.xtrasite.be/Ensie/Ongoingprojects/IRISinTimisoara/tabid/1392/Default.aspx and http://www.iris-network.eu/49-131,timisoara-campagne-televisee.php

The relevance of Local and national Government

Local Government organisation varies from country to country, and culture to culture. Nevertheless, Local Government in general has become the most relevant level of decision-making in terms of the concrete and successful support for solidarity economy. It is the level closest to inhabitants, where land zoning and social inclusion policies are effectively implemented. Supportive policy generally leads to a more inclusive and relevant approach.

The video http://wwwyoutube.com/watch?v=7quDENt005Q&feature=related on how Local Authorities can play a key role in enabling both solidarity economy and food sovereignty to solve many issues of local small-scale farmers and locally disadvantaged communities is a significant example: small-scale organic farmers selling at the local farmers' market enjoy the additional clientele of socially disadvantaged people who have received municipal food vouchers that can only be used at the farmers' market. Those benefiting from the vouchers also commit to attending a municipally-run

course on cooking and nutrition, thereby encouraging healthy eating habits and building new skills in food preparation and home-canning.

The video Flemmington Community Gardens in Australia, http://ww.youtube.com/watch?v=5_ETQnV15_g&feature=related allotments provided to locally disadvantaged communities encourages local vegetable growing, barter and cultural exchange in an urban context

The video of Local Food book launch by Rob Hopkins, of the Transition towns movement also mentions things such as garden sharing: people with gardens that they don't use, and people with no gardens who would like to grow their own fruit and vegetables. The video also mentions community gardens, allotments and community supported agriculture as means of building local food sovereignty. (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gkMS--koKqk)

Other strands of solidarity economy and practical case studies.

Solidarity finance, Local Currencies, time banks and barter

This strand of solidarity economy is increasingly well-organised. It is also cross-cutting, as money and finance, loans and financial support of various kinds are present throughout society and the economy. There are an increasing number of genuinely ethical banks (Banca Etica etc), and systems for mortgages, investment in land etc. This background paper merely hopes to draw attention to this, as is not a field that the author feels able to write on in any detail.

In addition to the FIESS paper on finance, it is worth mentioning some specific aspects of solidarity economy that are relevant to definacialisation, essentially complementary currencies, barter and Time Banks. Complementary currencies are widely accepted as enabling local communities to escape the speculative commodification of goods (and food in particular). They are an excellent method of overcoming the question of affordability of food and other locally produced goods. Complementary currency was one of the key tools that enabled Argentina to overcome their economic crisis at the turn of the century. Heloisa Primavera in an Argentinian specialist in this field. Japan had over 200 complementary currencies that were created during the last economic crisis in 2003. They remained uncoordinated, and many have ceased to exist. Totnes, the home of the Transition Town movement has a local currency accepted in over 70 local shops and businesses. Many other transition towns are now also using local currencies. Margit Kennedy is a German expert who has supported the implementation of many local currencies, including the SOL in France… An international website, www.complementarycurrency.org is most helpful.

A good illustrative article on the implications for South Africa can be found at http://www.sane.org.za/pubs/complementary.htm

Many lesser-developed nations and an increasing number of communities in developed societies in the current crisis use still barter as a means of exchange. It is not linked to any financial system, and is clearly based on what people produce and need. It enables exchange of goods and services without any formal financial constraint. As a system, it is as old as the human community…

Time banks (LETS) are a commonly recognised network. More information is available on http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/local_exchange_trading_system

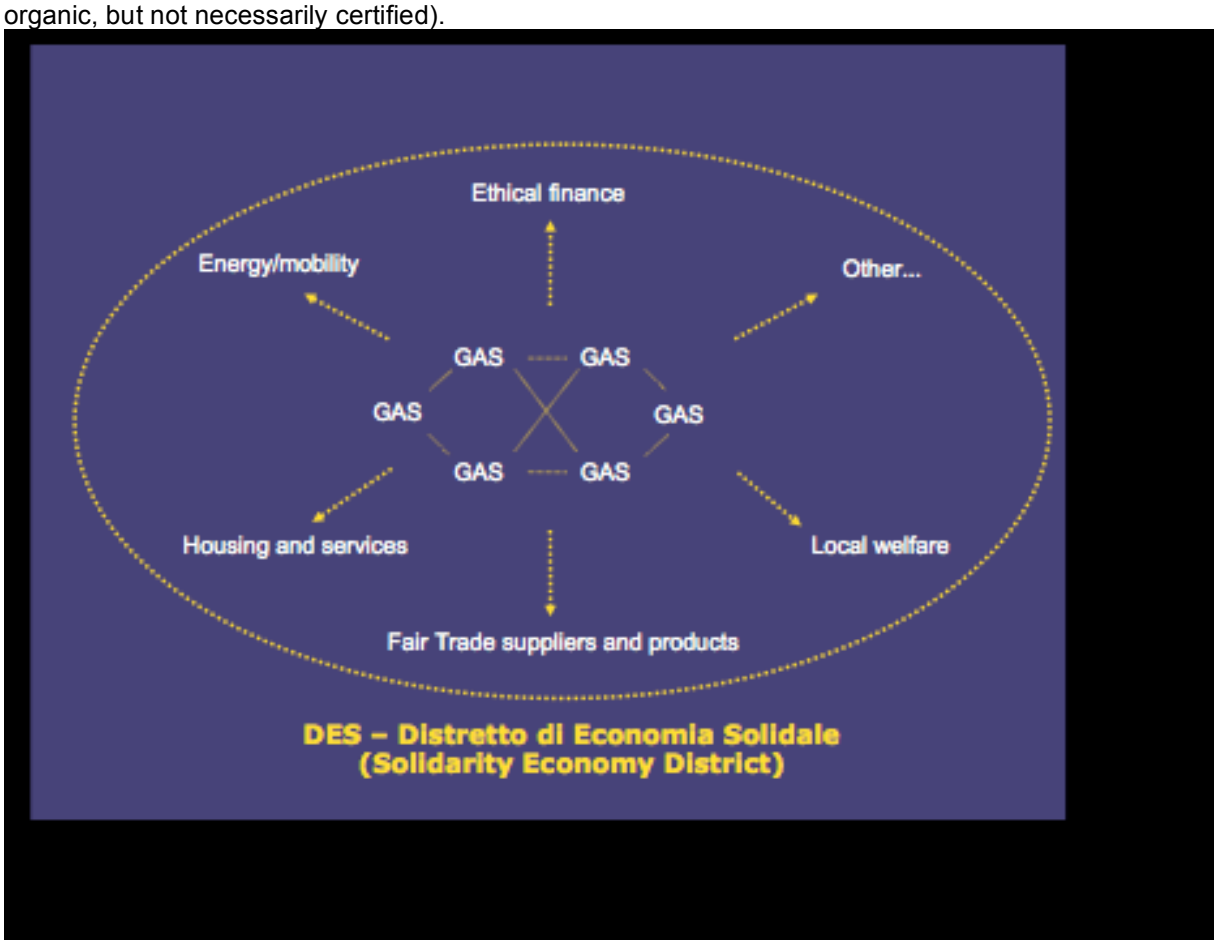
A combination of these three systems can usefully enable local populations to access local food from producers in a way and at "prices" that are fair to both producers and consumers.

Scaling up Solidarity economy and conclusions.

The food sovereignty movement part of solidarity economy has been significantly scaled up and interconnected, largely through the Via Campesina and their allies. It is undoubtedly the fullest manifestation of solidarity economy exists. There are some significant cultural habits involving direct sales in the food sector in developed countries, particularly in Japan, where although there is little official data available, almost 10% of all food is bought through direct sales of various kinds (Teikei, Seikatsu…). Here is the link and calculation: http://www.jeinou.com/column/cat113/2011/10/31/093000.html

２０１１年７月に発表された「農産物地産地消等実態調査」によれば、農産物直売所は全国に１万６８１６カ所あることになっています。その売上高は、８７６７億円となりました。国内で流通している野菜と果物は、消費者購入ベースで１０兆円程度だといわれます。そうだとすれば、農産物直売所のシェアは９％ということになります。つまり、残りの９１％は、スーパーマーケットか八百屋さんで売っているわけです。
According to the data on direct consumption of agro-crops issued in July 2011, there are 16,816 direct sale stores in Japan. and their total sale is about 876,700,000,000 yen. The whole sale of vegetable and fruits in the Japanese market is about 10,000,000,000,000 yen, so the simply calculating, the share of the direct sale store count 9% of the whole market and the other 91% are consumed in supermarkets and regular vegetable shops. Nevertheless, 10% is not a figure that can be considered marginal.

In Italy, the GAS (Solidarity purchasing groups) also play an increasing role, and have connected with other sectors of the solidarity economy to form solidarity economy districts in several large cities. The price of the produce is actually lower than in supermarkets, and the quality far higher (generally organic, but not necessarily certified).



Andrea Calori, Founder member of GAS the RES, Politecnico di Milano

In an increasing number of towns and rural areas in France, local government tenders now include clauses that favour local small-scale organic producers as suppliers of food for school canteens. This practice links the logic of sustainable local development and solidarity economy. But the scaling up at national or European level has yet to occur.

An increasing number of people are understanding the connection between solidarity economy, CSA and other forms of solidarity purchasing and local links as a means of relocalising job creation, sustainable small-scale farmng and processing, healthy nutrition and a more sustainable form of local development, as witnessed in the two articles below:

http://www.bioaddict.fr/article/la-federation-des-agriculteurs-bio-valorise-le-bio-local-a2635p1.html
and
http://economiasolidaria.org/noticias/no_es_lo_mismo_hablar_de_alimentos_que_hablar_de_alimentacion
and also the Urgenci (International CSA network) blog: http://blog.urgenci.net/

Many transition towns are have also achieved an integrated approach to the various dimensions, although, as previously stated, they do not necessarily call it solidarity economy, but we this movement includes all the values and many of the practices of solidarity economy already described above. The Transition Town movement also widely promotes agro-ecology, and Rob Hopkins was the founder of the first two-year agro-ecology university course in Ireland

Conclusions.

"Social and solidarity economy can be defined as follows : It brings together cooperative organisations, mutual societies, associations, collectives that place men and women at the centre of their projects, and that operate on the basis of egalitarian principles (one person, one vote…), solidarity between members and economic independence. They implement solidarity through democratic governance, gender equality, North/South justice, food sovereignty, respect for the environment, social inclusion and solidarity finance. It aims to experiment and to implement new economic models by prosing viable options to the current « classical » economic system, and a-proposing the means to carry out an effective economic transition ». Eric Lavillunière, INEES, Luxemburg.

There remain certain difficulties to scaling up. The first is to achieve the necessary joined-up approach between the various strands. The second is to ensure and maintain citizens' empowerment. This can be supported by participatory budgeting, but specific clauses that favour local solidarity goods and services, but essentially on the progressive building of genuine empowerment of a strong civil society. The example of Romania, mentioned above should be heeded. Bridges between the different networks need to be built and strengthened.

Another paradoxical difficulty is that many of the traditional forms of solidarity economy, such as barter and other local solutions, still a real part of life in many of the lesser developed countries (Africa, parts of Asia and even Central Europe) are "invisible". As they are not part of the market economy, they have often been considered as retrograde. They are however not only part of the solution, but are deeply anchored in local and national cultural traditions. This is a precious support for the potential development of solidarity economy.

It means that with cultural sensitivity, policies that favour these traditional practices, combined with the introduction of other proven aspects of solidarity economy as illustrated above, such as organised community-supported agriculture and local currencies, can provide viable pathways for relocalisation, decommodification and definancialisation of the economy. Solidarity economy can also provide a framework to enables Civil Society Organisations to move towards a truly civil-society empowered model of production, consumption, services and finance that cannot easily be corrupted. It opens up the perspective to sustainable, decommodified economic solutions and food nets that remain outside the control of those wishing to speculate on, seek illicit gain from, or take advantage of the current economic, social and financial crisis. It enables the promotion of best practice, such as agro-ecology, local currencies, community -supported agriculture, while retaining local cultural habits and placing food sovereignty at the heart of its approach.

Judith Hitchman, January 2012