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**SOLIDARITY ECONOMY IN BRAZIL:  
MOVEMENT, DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE**

**Analysis through a Polanyian understanding of the  
economy**

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## **Abstract**

Solidarity economy initiatives constitute a worldwide phenomenon that is today at the very heart of numerous economic and social debates. They are active in a very diverse number of economic sectors, aiming for example to creating employment and income for poor and low-qualified workers, excluded from the conventional, State or private, labour markets. In the paper, we begin with presenting a *Polanyian framework for the analysis of such economic activities*, which enables us to develop a plural and integral conception of a productive organization, and study all these dimensions together. In a second part, we draw upon the thesis of Polanyi that economy is a political and institutionalized process and present an historic overview of the construction of the solidarity economy "sector" in Brazil. We will put forward the hypothesis *that the solidarity economy today, in Brazil as well as in Latin America in general, represents a social movement*. In the third and last part of the paper, we ask ourselves *if the solidarity economy movement led to a change in grassroots economic initiatives, such as the "people's cooperatives"*. We present the results of an exploratory research undertaken of 15 people's cooperatives in the State of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil.

## **Keywords**

Polanyi, solidarity economy, people's cooperative, social movement, local development, Brazil.

# **SOLIDARITY ECONOMY IN BRAZIL: MOVEMENT, DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE<sup>1</sup>**

## **Analysis through a Polanyian understanding of the economy**

### **1 Introduction**

Solidarity economy initiatives constitute a worldwide phenomenon that is today at the very heart of numerous economic and social debates. Indeed, the current crisis of the Welfare State and of the traditional State-market nexus in the European Union, as well as the State and market failures in developing countries and the loss of legitimacy of the discourse based on the idea that everything can be solved through the market, lead us to interrogate the societal role played by such organisations (Peemans, 2004). Solidarity economy organizations are active in a very diverse number of economic sectors, aiming for example to creating employment and income for poor and low-qualified workers, excluded from the conventional, State or private, labour markets. Also development studies needs to analyze the ability of such economic initiatives to produce goods and services while, at the same time, responding to social and environmental needs. We have to examine to what extent these organizations are able to reconcile economic with social and environmental dimensions.

In this paper we begin with presenting a *Polanyian framework for the analysis of such economic activities*, which enables us to develop a plural and integral conception of a productive organization, and study all these dimensions together.

In a second part of the paper, we draw upon the thesis of Polanyi (1944) that economy is a political and institutionalized process and present an historic overview of the construction of the solidarity economy "sector" in Brazil. We will put forward the hypothesis *that the solidarity economy today, in Brazil as well as in Latin America in general, represents a social movement*. Its construction as a political actor, the political organization of the sector, in turn led to the emergence of specific public policies. These represent a new phenomenon of institutionalization for solidarity economic practices in people's neighbourhoods.

In the third and last part of the paper, we ask ourselves *if the solidarity economy movement led to a change in grassroots economic initiatives, such as the "people's cooperatives"*. To what extent did this political innovation at the meso level alter the basis? What are the effects of participation in the solidarity economy movement on the practices developed by these production organizations? To begin to answer this question albeit in a preliminary way, we present the results of an exploratory research undertaken (in 2008) of 15 people's cooperatives in the State of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil.

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<sup>1</sup> The authors are grateful to the professors Marthe Nyssens (Université catholique de Louvain–Belgium) and Jean-Louis Laville (Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers–France), the co-directors of the doctoral research that gave birth to this article: Lemaitre, 2009a.

## 2 Towards a Polanyian framework for the analysis of the economic activities

Generally the literature on solidarity economy (SE) defines these initiatives according to their economic characteristics: being autonomous and of private nature and whose purpose is not to maximize profits but to provide services to their members or to the community (Defourny and Develtere, 1999). While participating in markets, these collective entities do not aim at maximizing return on capital. This does not mean that these initiatives cannot, or even must not, realise a financial surplus. But it means that the generation of any surplus is a way to perform their activity and not its main purpose. It is a means, but not an end in itself.

In this paper, we build on a *substantive* understanding of the economy as developed by Polanyi (1944). This author aimed to re-conceptualizing the economy in a plural sense: moving away from a view focusing on a utility-maximizing behaviour in a framework of limited resources (Robbins, 1932). Polanyi promoted an understanding of the economy as one that includes all phenomena related to interdependencies among human beings and with their natural environment. This substantive understanding must be seen as an invitation to see the economy, as well as the organizations producing goods and services, as *plural*, that is, as articulating a variety of actors and logics (Laville, 2004) while participating to the construction of a given territory.

Indeed, Polanyi (1944) shows that societies combine, in diverse ways according to time and space, a plurality of exchange modes of goods and services. The market principle refers to the exchange of goods and/or services through the mechanism of price determination, which makes the demand and the supply of these goods and services converge. “The relationship between buyer and seller is established on a contractual basis” (Laville and Nyssens, 2001: 324). This can happen at different scales of economic activity: local, regional, national or international. With the redistribution principle, production is collected by a central authority, which has the responsibility to distribute it amongst the agents submitted to it. It implies rules of taxation and transfers. Redistribution can also happen at different economic scales. In our modern societies, the central authority organising the redistribution uses to be the democratic State. The reciprocity principle of circulation of goods and/or services expresses a specific social tie amongst individuals or groups who, receiving a gift, are supposed to give freely a counter-gift, as a complex mix of altruism and self-interest (Laville and Nyssens, 2001). The economic scale is the community, as reciprocity is embedded in social ties. Finally, the domestic administration principle corresponds to autarchy or self-provisioning. It is the production of goods and services for and by the group itself (as the family).

In neo-classical and contractualist economics, as well as in neo-institutional economics, the market economy is the first one; it is the main matrix for the economic activities (Nyssens, 2000). The non-market (or redistributive) economy exists, but it is explained in residual (supplementary) terms, i.e. it appears in case of “market failures” to allocate goods and/or services. The non-monetary (or reciprocity) economy is hidden. The market is naturalized and there is an implicit hierarchy amongst the various economic

principles, as well as amongst the various economic actors (private for-profit enterprises, State and non-profit organizations). However, Polanyi (1944) argues that every society combines, through time and according to political choices, the different economic principles of circulation of goods and/or services: the market, the redistribution, the reciprocity and the domestic administration. A Polanyian framework for the economy aims thus to analyze, *without any a priori hierarchy*, the specificities of each of these multiple exchange principles and how they interact, the complementarities or the tensions between them.

Neo-classical economics provides few tools to study in-depth the production organizations: the enterprise is supposed to maximize profits and is analyzed in purely technical terms. It is a “black box” which varies according to the production function, which formalizes the state of the technology at a given unit of time and consequently the relation between the inputs and the outputs. Contract theories, in addition to the production costs, also take into account transaction costs and the transactional aspects are the center of the analysis. According to Eymard Duvernay (2004), “the concept of the firm as a production function is supplanted by the concept of the firm like a structure of coordination” of contracts (p. 32). The firm exist by the virtue of market imperfections arising from information problems but it is presented in these theories as an extension of the market, in the sense that it is a “legal fiction” (Jensen and Meckling, 1976), *i.e.* an artificial legal construction used to concentrate a whole of contractual relations similar to the market. Neo-institutional economics is vast field of inquiry which exceeds a mere contractual approach and which aims at the study of economic organizations as institutions, showing their efficiency as governance structures. This then constitutes considerable progress in relation to the analysis of the organizations since it becomes now possible to study them more in-depth and in particular to apprehend their diversity. In this perspective, the organizational forms observed are, like the other institutions, explained in terms of market failures: they appear when the market cannot allocate the resources efficiently, *i.e.* by minimizing costs. The standard neo-classical theory and its extensions thus provide either a minimal vision of the enterprise, either a vision in terms of an efficient solution, which leaves *in fine* little place for logics and values conveyed by the projects of solidarity economy which pursue a plurality of objectives.

Before explaining more precisely the conception of the productive organization in a Polanyian framework, let’s briefly discuss the relation between the organization and its environment. Traditional economic theories focus, in various ways, on the insertion of the organization into a context which is captured conceptually either in market, technological and/or informational terms. It is mainly the influence of the environment on the enterprise which is studied, according to a contingency relation. The idea that the organization can participate in the construction of public action remains little developed and is not at the core of the analysis. Polanyi (1944) sees the economy as an institutionalized political process. Beyond the simple question of rationality, this leads to inclusion of the notion of legitimacy in the analysis and to see the enterprise not only in terms of its organizational dimension but also in terms of its institutional context. If the organization is dependent upon its environment, it is also able to generate changes in its environment. The

relation between the organization and its environment has to be seen an interaction: just as the environment shapes the organization, the organizations construct their environment in turn. In particular, if we consider a non-market environment, we can say that the institutionalization of the SE organizations is a reciprocal process: a double move through which, on the one hand, these organizations manage to play a role in the public debate, to construct a collective actor (organized and recognized in the public sphere) and to participate in the development of public policies. On the other hand, their specific inscription in the public sphere and within public policies can influence in turn the organizational practices developed.

**TABLE 1**  
**Formal and substantive approaches for studying the economic activities**

|  | <b>Neo-classical, contract and neo-institutional economics</b>  | <b>Polanyian framework</b>  |
|--|---|---|
| <b>Definition of the economy</b>                       | Formal  | Substantive   |
| <b>Coordination modes, exchange logics</b>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The market is the first principle</li> <li>- The non-market principle is residual</li> <li>- The non-monetary economy is hidden</li> </ul>           | Plural economy => the market, the redistribution and the reciprocity are analyzed without any <i>a priori</i> hierarchies   |
| <b>Organization</b>                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Black box</li> <li>- Extension of the market</li> <li>- Efficient solution</li> </ul>  | Human construction<br>Integral view, plurality of actors and logics   |
| <b>Relation of the organization to its environment</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mainly the influence of the environment on the organization</li> <li>- Environment mainly in market, technological or informational terms</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Interaction, reciprocal influence between the organization and the environment</li> <li>- Focus on a non-market environment (political dimension)</li> </ul> |

Source: summarised from Lemaître (2009a), pp. 65-66

## **A plural and integral conception of the productive organization**

The Polanyian substantive economic approach enables us to examine the enterprises not only with reference to their economic goal and their monetary market resources but according to a plural and integral conception of the organization, grasping a broader set of potential logics that can spread within them. That is why, in the third part of the article, we analyze the economic initiatives according to a multidimensional grid, which captures analytically their contribution to the construction of a given territory.

Thanks to this grid that we develop hereafter, we can analyse how an organisation combines different relations amongst actors inside its governance structures and relies on a specific combination of multiple monetary and non-monetary resources in order to pursue a hybrid set of dimensions linked to the local development (dimensions which can sometimes be in tension) (Lemaître

2009a). We can analyse an organisation according to different dimensions and examine how multiple exchange logics connect with the plurality of objectives.

**Box 1**  
**Multidimensional grid for the analysis of the projects**

**1. Which are the benefits generated? The *achievements* (contributions to local development)**

- The economic dimension (production activity of private or collective goods & services)
- The social dimension (employment creation, community bonds, social cohesion, gender issues, ...)
- The environmental dimension (preservation of the environment)
- The political dimension (citizenship, action in the public sphere)

**2. Which are the relations amongst internal actors? The *governance structures***

- Foundation group
- Decision-making processes
- Revenue distribution and surplus allocation

**3. On the basis of which exchange logics? The *external economic relations* (monetary and non-monetary resources)**

- The market (revenues of sales of goods & services => links to the markets)
- The public redistribution (subsidies => eventual links to public policies)
- The voluntary redistribution (donations => eventual links to international solidarity)
- The reciprocity (mutual aid => the community embeddedness)
- The domestic administration (self-provisioning => the group)

We firstly investigate the *achievements* of the enterprises and by this way their potential contribution to the local development. According to Evers (2001), one can distinguish between different categories of organizational achievements, which can in turn be expressed as a set of more specific ones. They can be *economic*, related to the (collective) entrepreneurial nature of the organization. The economic goal corresponds to the *activity of producing goods and/or services* and the necessity to achieve this in a financially sustainable way. The production can be a private one. It can also be a collective one, a service done to the community, as for example the provision of a social service to improve living conditions in deprived areas and to alleviate poverty. The *social* dimension of the organization is connected to the creation of community bonds, the strengthening of the social cohesion, the participation to identity issues, the reducing gender inequalities, etc. We also analyze the employment and revenue creation by the enterprise. The mechanisms of employment creation are studied according to a quantitative but also a qualitative perspective, with a focus on working conditions.

Another category of organizational achievements is the *environmental* one. This potential objective of the enterprise refers to the *preservation of the environment* dimension. It can be the generation of environmental benefits, with activities of producing ecological goods and/or services (as sorting and

recycling or recuperating and revaluing waste,...). It can either be the internalizing of the environmental externalities in the production process, *i.e.* other production activities done in an ecologically sustainable way, as the use of ecological inputs, the minimization of the environmental costs of production, ... (Anastasiadis and Mays, 2008).

Finally, the potential political (or civic) dimension of the organization is linked to *citizenship construction processes*. It is related to norms, values, trust and networks in which the enterprise can be embedded. More generally, it is also related to its ability of enabling public action, *i.e.* collective expression in the *public sphere* (Habermas, 1991)<sup>2</sup>. Related to this achievement, we study workers' empowerment issues and actions of advocacy of the organization in a (even incipient) public sphere, in the name of the common good. It can be, for example, claims linked to the implementation of decent working conditions, of fair trade rules, of another development model as the one carried out by the SE movement. Indeed, economic initiatives can carry a social critique and play the role of political actors, who defend causes in the public debate and who call for the development of public policies related to these issues (Lemaître, 2009a)<sup>3</sup>. They may influence institutional frameworks and future public policies.

With a Polanyian framework, SE organizations are thus analyzed through their economic dimension but also through their social, environmental and their political dimensions. These dimensions of the SE organizations tend to be handled separately in the literature. While apprehending them together, it is possible to study the SE organizational practices and their institutionalization processes, as well as the interactions between these (Lemaître, 2009a).

A second research axis is connected to the analysis of the *governance structures* developed by the enterprises, *i.e.* the type of actors inside the organization and the kind of relationships amongst them. We begin studying, in a diachronical perspective, the founding groups, the social relationships on the basis of the initiative that make possible the emergence of economic practices. This is followed by an analysis of the ownership of the enterprise,

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<sup>2</sup> According to the Habermasian approach, the public sphere is the “arena of discursive debates between equals, the definition of a consensus around a ‘common good’” (Pirrotte, 2007: 58). It is as “a particular sphere where is played a process of argumentation and of deliberation mainly within a dense fabric of associations and institutions” (Pirrotte, 2007: 55).

<sup>3</sup> Of course, traditional for-profit enterprises can also develop social and political activities. But such activities are more peripheral. They do not constitute goals in themselves; they are not the inner finality of the organizations. In such enterprises, the major goal remains profit maximization, which tends to dominate all the other possible achievements of the entrepreneurial act (Weisbrod, 1988; Hansmann, 1996). The other dimensions tend to be subordinated to the lucrative objective. By instance, a lot of for-profit private enterprises do develop, through the participation in networks and federations, a set of lobbying activities in the public sphere, demanding by instance the acknowledgment and the support of the sector by the public regulation. But such political actions are strategic and instrumental. Indeed, they are not done in a general interest perspective, in the name of the common good. They are tools for the development of the economic dimension of the enterprise, which remains the first one.

which means, in a broad sense (1) the aspects linked to the decision-making processes (issues of economic democracy) and (2) the mechanisms of division of the revenue of the activity and of allocation of its surplus (Hansmann, 1996). As we indicated before, we are studying entrepreneurial initiatives which do not aim at the accumulation in the capitalist sense. Other logics can be pursued, but these do not prevent them from attempting to extract the highest margin from a transaction. It could be, for example, *extensive accumulation* (Lautier, 2004), where the surplus is invested in order to expand the activity, to multiply its units. Other authors point out logics of familial solidarity or “collective reproduction” (Coraggio, 2005), where the priority is given to the enhancement of the revenue, the employment creation and the living conditions of the relatives and other members of a given community.

Lastly, we reconstitute the monetary as well as the non-monetary resources used by the projects, as indicators of the embeddedness of the cooperative in the different types of economy. Indeed, a Polanyian understanding of the economy invites us to study the production unit not only according to the monetary resources (appearing in the profit and loss account of the enterprise) but to account also for the non-monetary resources (voluntary work, gifts of equipment or inputs, allowance of personnel or building and so on), paying then also attention to the dynamics happening in the non-monetary economy. We valued the non-monetary resources at their market price, *i.e.* at the price the enterprise should have paid if it had to acquire this resource through the market mechanism (constituting then a cost for the organization). The sum of the monetary and of the non-monetary resources of the organization constitutes its total resources. This allows to make visible the entire mix of *exchange logics* mobilized by the organization to be able to develop its activities (Gardin, 2006). The non-monetary resources of the organization can be quite important in the small, often informal, people’s cooperatives in the South of Brazil. This methodology allows us to map in an innovative way the different regulation modes on which the production units rely and which attest their *external economic relations*.

According to Laville and Nyssens (2001), following Polanyi (1944), we can distinguish between *market resources*—stemming from the sales of goods and services, informing about the link(s) the cooperative holds with the market(s)—*resources emanating from reciprocity relations*—embedded in local networks of solidarity, in social ties and thus attesting from community embeddedness—and *resources issuing from domestic administration*—stemming from self-provisioning (from members of the organization and/or persons of their household).

There are also redistributive resources, *i.e.* resources previously collected by a central entity, which has the responsibility to spread them. It can be *public redistribution*, constituted by grants given by the public sector: local, regional, national or even international. Public redistribution includes also what we can call “delegated redistribution”, *i.e.* the public funds coming from the international development cooperation<sup>4</sup>, targeted to the productive groups in the South but passing through the support given to them by NGOs, unions or

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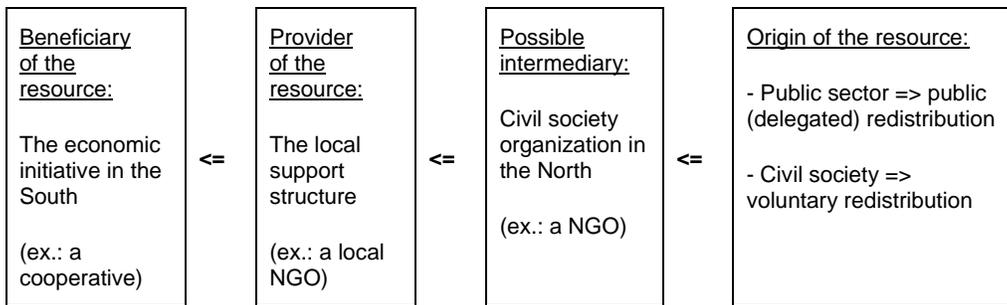
<sup>4</sup>The bilateral one. Indeed, we do not have in our sample any case of multilateral cooperation.

other local support structures. In such case of public funds managed by NGOs and so on, there is the presence of public policies.

However, when the support of the local NGOs and other support structures to the productive groups in the South is financed by the capital of NGOs or other civil society organizations in the North (money coming from the international civil society), we decided to call it *voluntary redistribution*. Indeed, even if, in this case, the support is financed by the private international solidarity—and it is not collected within a compulsory way—we include it in the redistribution because it is not related to the symmetry characterizing, for Polanyi (1944), the reciprocity resources, embedded in mutual knowledge and social ties (Servet, 2007). On the contrary, it has more to do with the centrality of the redistribution: the resources being collected by a central entity, which has the responsibility to allocate it according to some criteria<sup>5</sup>.

The following scheme reconstitutes the path of a resource of the economic initiative originating from international development cooperation.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Path of a resource coming from the international development cooperation**



Source: Lemaître (2009a).

<sup>5</sup> Actually, there is a debate in the literature about this question, as Polanyi did not really foresee such hybrid case of international exchange logic, mixing redistribution and reciprocity aspects. We could then also have considered it as “international reciprocity”, as a mix of altruism and self-interest for a better world. We decided however it was better to differentiate these more anonymous international solidarity funds from the gifts-counter-gifts charactering the reciprocity relations happening in the local community.

### **3 Solidarity economy: a newly institutionalised social movement**

After having presented and justified the adoption of a Polanyian framework for the research, we continue with the next part of the paper and develop an historical overview of the construction of the SE “sector” in Brazil: the emergence of this identity and its constitution as a social movement.

#### **From initiatives of work and income generation to solidarity economy initiatives**

It is clear that economic practices whose purpose is not capitalist accumulation exist in Brazil already for a long time ago, developed among others by the large section of the population living on the margin of the formal circuits of the economy and developing mutual support and solidarity practices to cope with the lack of access to dignified living conditions. From the second half of 1980s, after the military regime, there is a revival of such projects, due to the resurgence of social movements, the social action of the Church, and of non governmental organizations (NGOs). At this time, due to the crisis characterizing the 1980s in the Latin American economies, there has been also, mainly in the urban areas, an additional set of excluded persons (Carvalho de França Filho and Lavielle, 2004).

Facing a huge social crisis and the lack of public policies in order to tackle the problem, popular actors and civil society support structures accompanying these actors (NGOs, social movements, churches,...) saw the need “to elaborate concrete options, immediate, medium and long term economic alternatives which could boost struggles, previously mainly centered on the conquest of political spheres to transform unfair structures, or to require the establishment of social policies. Many initiatives appear; they constitute new spaces of discussion and of social practice” (translated from Sarria Icaza, 2006: 2). We witnessed the development of multiple local projects, grassroots cooperatives and community production groups.

However, most scientific literature and field actors considered these initiatives as “associativism and cooperativism” or as “initiatives of work and income generation” (Mello and Silveira, 1990). During the late 1980s and 1990s, different exchanges and meetings took place between workers and support structures between Brazil, Venezuela, Mexico, France and Spain (RBSES, 2006). It is at this time, with a *first political organization stage of the SE in the form of creation of networks* that the use of the term of “solidarity economy” spreads in Brazil. The SE initiatives and the structures of the civil society supporting these initiatives become organized in networks.

#### **Towards a diversification of the solidarity economy initiatives and of the structures supporting these initiatives**

The oldest foundation root of SE, and the most important in terms of number of initiatives, which has emerged out from the “popular world”, excluded from

the mainstream sectors of the economy, be these public or private, is the so-called “*people’s cooperativism*”. These are collectives of workers coming from the lower classes and deprived from the access to conventional systems of jobs, income distribution and social protection. Under the legal status of cooperative, association or as informal groups, they focus then on improving the living conditions of the members and on generating income for them. In these “people’s cooperatives”, the labour is the main production factor, which predetermines the objectives of the enterprise (Razeto, 1988)<sup>6</sup>.

During the 1990s a second formative root of SE appears, originating this time from the formal economy. Here one finds *cooperatives founded by the trade union movement, inter alia* as response to the bankruptcies of companies and their recovery by the unemployed workers who transformed them into cooperatives. Actually, the industrial crisis of the beginning of the 1990s, and the many dismissals which result from this, put at the risk the sectors previously integrated in the formal labour market. The trade unions, in search of repositioning, start to consider new alternatives. The “Central Unica dos Trabalhadores” (CUT), the biggest trade union confederation of the country, initiated programs in order to promote SE. Today still, CUT trains SE trade union militants and members of other support structures.

After the networking initiatives described above, other developments took place in the 1990s and have to be mentioned, not by their number but because of the notoriety, the symbolic importance they acquired in the field. On the one hand, there are the initiatives, with varied practices and methodologies, in the field of solidarity finances which in Brazil gathered under the denomination of “*people’s banks*”. On the other hand, there are systems of local exchanges of goods and services, gathered under the label of local “*exchange clubs*”. These concern exchanges of goods and services, with or without social currency, according to a very diverse set of criteria decided by the group involved and which aim to re-embed economic practices in social logics.

Lastly, one can also observe practices of *horizontal and vertical integration of SE initiatives*. As far as horizontal integration is concerned, SE initiatives, characterized by a strong territorial anchoring, are sometimes integrated in order to try to answer together to the non-satisfied social needs in a given territory. In such a case, they enroll in a *perspective of local development*, through the creation of SE initiatives. Thus, one observes certain local associations which develop at the same time production of goods, provision of services, solidarity finances, exchange clubs and so on. As far as vertical integration of SE initiatives is concerned, they are the product of recent efforts of constitution of *value chains of SE*, where most of the elements in the chain are products of SE initiatives.

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<sup>6</sup> The people’s cooperativism has to be distinguished from traditional cooperativism, which appeared in Brazil in the end of the 19th century, through the immigration of Europeans which founded cooperatives in the spirit of Charles Fourier (Schmidt and Perius, 2003). These traditional cooperatives were progressively transformed in big private companies, mostly active in the monoculture of agricultural products for export.

In order to develop and to organize themselves politically, these SE initiatives count on the assistance of a heterogeneous set of support structures, with diverse methodologies and political visions. There are in Brazil around 22,876 SE support structures (SIES, 2011).

The people's cooperatives, which emerged from lower classes, tend to be sustained by professional organizations providing services to what they defined as their "target group". They are mainly NGOs (local, but financed mostly by the international development cooperation) and universities (leading for example programs of enterprises incubation as the "Technological Incubator for People's Cooperatives" (ITCP)). Regarded as the mediators of the civil society and being often inspired by the methods of *popular education* (Freire, 1987)<sup>7</sup>, these structures belong to a political vision named by Sarria Icaza (2008) as "popular/solidary". They encompass progressive professionals and militants, constituted in a broad sense, of streams of the catholic thought influenced by the liberation theology. It is a militant action from the basis, which put forward the protagonism of the "poor", considering, as the subjects of SE, the popular classes identified as the "excluded from the society". There are also, in this political vision, militants integrated in global citizenship networks. It is a globalised militant action, which focus on global struggles and on the need for conscience transformation and for political mobilization of the lower classes but also of citizens in general.

The second root of SE initiatives, resulted from the formal world of work, i.e. the self-managed recovered companies, tends to be accompanied and supported by more or less structured forms of self-organization of social bases, which can be hierarchical, such as the trade unions. According to Sarria Icaza (2008), these union militant networks belong, as the militant networks linked to a political party, to a "vanguardist/classist" political vision<sup>8</sup>. They consider the subjects of the SE initiatives as the "class of workers", for whom it is necessary to develop the instruments of economic control, through the implementation of self-management cooperatives. In this reasoning, the assumption of power by the working class happens through the strengthening of the economic organizations owned by the workers.

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<sup>7</sup> This pedagogical and political option gives priority to the recognition of the knowledge of the popular actors and to their protagonism. The finality is the empowerment and the actuation, for the emancipation from the relation oppressor-oppressed. The methods are not transmissives: it is not a question of a transfer of knowledge between a teacher (educator) and learners but of an exchange, a construction of collective knowledge emancipator for the whole of the parts of the group including the educator.

<sup>8</sup> It is obvious that, in the reality, there is not always a clear demarcation between these two worlds presented by Sarria Icaza (2008), which can mix according to individuals' trajectories and inside some joint networks.

## **From solidarity economy networks to the solidarity economy movement and the National Secretary of Solidarity Economy in Brazil**

Despite many regional, national and international networks, it is particularly since 2001, around the successive World Social Forums in Porto Alegre, that an identity of SE in Brazil has crystallized and is revealed. Above all, it is from there that these practices are constituted as an organized political actor, through the constitution of *the social movement of SE*, as a gathering a diversity of actors (SE initiatives, support structures and members of public bodies sustaining such initiatives). It aims to defend SE as a model of development, alternative to capitalism. *The construction of this political actor corresponds to a second stage of political organization of the SE, which characterizes the SE sector today.* We will outline below some milestones of this important historical phase in the definition of SE. We will also see that the SE movement is deeply related to the political party which emerged concomitantly on the national governmental scene and which backs the claims of the movement by creating the National Secretary of Solidarity Economy. This is *the birth, at the national level, of a third political phase of SE, through the development of public policies related to this field.*

At the occasion of the organization of the first World Social Forum (WSF) in 2001, a national working group was created, composed by NGOs and support networks of SE, acting in urban and rural areas and emanating from the social action of the catholic church, of trade unions, universities, popular social movements and so on. It included also representatives of the prefectures and of the government of the State of Rio Grande of the South, judged as progressives and where there were already governmental actions in favour of SE. This working group continued during the next WSF, organizing there the activities of SE but also gathering various actors in order to ensure the representation of the theme of SE in the presidential campaign of 2002 and to claim a space which could develop public policies intended for this field. They decided to support the candidate Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, of the Labor Party (PT). The working group addressed a letter to the Lula government, demanding *inter alia* the creation of a National Secretary of Solidarity Economy (SENAES).

The letter which has been circulating widely, called for the adhesion of “militants of the movement of the solidarity economy” and convoking them to gatherings in order to build a “agenda of common interests for the whole of the movement of the solidarity economy”, as “a strategy of development for the Brazilian society” (FBES, 2006). It is only from this moment on, when the negotiations with PT had already started, that the incipient movement opens more to other protagonists, in particular the actors at the basis of the initiatives, i.e. the proper SE organizations.

At the time of the third WSF, in January 2003, the Lula government confirms the foundation of a new Secretary, the SENAES. It was formally created in June 2003 per presidential decree<sup>9</sup>, within one of the oldest ministries of the Brazilian public administration, the Labour and Employment

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<sup>9</sup> Diário Oficial da União – Seção 1 – Decreto n° 4 764.

Ministry (MTE), considered as one of the most important ministries for a government considered as popular, with strong roots in the trade union movement.

The WS Forum of 2003 also hosted a national plenary session of SE where it was decided to set up a “large process of popular mobilization” (FBES, 2006) in the States of the Federation in order to discuss the SE in Brazil. For the preparation the following national plenary session of SE, plenary SE sessions were organized in each of the 18 States of the Federation. In this next plenary session, which was held in Brasília in June 2003, more than 800 representatives came together from the state level plenary sessions. This heterogeneous assemblage of actors, from different roots, approved a “Charter of principles” in order to “constitute its identity” (FBES, 2006). It was decided, as convention, that the terminology of “solidarity economy” would be used from now on, considered as the most universal among the various conveyed terminologies. All agreed to consider ES as a model of development alternative to capitalism and as the foundation of sustainable development (FBES, 2006). The plenary session approved also a common “Platform of struggles”, presenting the claims of the movement and which formed then part of the action plan of the SENAES, being used as guide for the policies developed.

Finally, the plenary session instituted the Brazilian Forum of Solidarity Economy (FBES) for two tasks: mobilization and facilitation (FBES, 2006). The FBES obtained a differentiated statute compared to the other SE networks (although several of them are found in the FBES). From the beginning on, it was regarded as the delegate of the SE movement, gathering the majority of its actors and incorporating its principal forms of expression. It was decided that it would be the privileged interlocutor of the SENAES. While meeting very regularly, the SENAES and the FBES led most of their actions jointly, in a collaborative relationship.

Simultaneously a process of construction started of the “micro-regional” or “municipal” SE forums and of the SE forums at the level of the Federated States, with the aim of building the local ramifications of the gathering of actors, among others “so that each protagonist recognizes himself in the movement of the solidarity economy” (FBES, 2006). The SE forums are tripartite, composed of three types of actors, representing the “three segments of the solidarity economy movement in Brazil” (FBES, 2006): the SE initiatives themselves, the intermediate structures and networks of support to the development of the SE (NGOs, unions,...) and representatives of public authorities active in SE.

The Forums constitute the organized body of the social movement of SE<sup>10</sup>, the main tool by which it structured itself and interacts with the public bodies. They are arranged systematically at each level of authorities, sending representatives to the next level. They are open to the presence of the public bodies within them. Therefore, although the Forums assert their independence from public bodies while presenting themselves as spheres of coordination of the civil society, this political actor can become, according to the political

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<sup>10</sup> The practice of forums is not specific to the SE movement. It is found in other fields of political action of the Brazilian civil society (Dagnino, 2002).

configurations in place, the key-intermediary of the State during the negotiation and the construction of public policies.

### **About the social movement of solidarity economy**

The SE is a social movement, in the eyes of the actors of the field who recognize and identify themselves as such (FBES, 2006) and in terms of a number of generally accepted criteria. It is about an intentional gathering of various actors who, through cooperation, networking and joint mobilization, embody a project of social change. They explicitly intend to carry out a universal cause in the public sphere and to influence the forms of social life, notably through an opening to the public bodies in the form of political claims (composing the “Platform of struggles”). Joined together around a common identity and common values (the “Charter of principles”), the protagonists are opposed to capitalism (the social adversary) to defend, in a militant way, a “new” mode of production, consumption and wealth distribution, an alternative model of development, generating social benefits. *Much more than a given set of existing practices, for the actors involved, SE is a project of society.*

If we consider the analysis of social movements made by Touraine (1978), the mobilization around the solidarity economy has the characteristics of a social movement. Indeed, through the crucial importance of the networking, it carries a *project* of social change, of “*direction of the historicity, i.e. of the conduct models from which a society produces its practices*”. It defines its social opponent—developing a confrontational dimension, an *opposition* principle—and gives to itself an *identity* “with the shape of a project which carries the vision of another social arrangement and not of a mere punctual claim” (Neveu, 2005: 63).

The SE movement has represented one of the revivals of the social movements, which had weakened in the second half of the 1990s. It integrates, around a called “new approach of making the economy”, the question of the social rights into that of the democracy, at the time of a return in strength of the economic concerns related to the crisis and to the questioning of the hegemonic neoliberal model.

The successive WS Fora lodged the birth of the SE movement. Strong but broad references to certain principles make it possible to seek converge and gather around a certain number of common interests, groups of actors in search of social solutions but with sometimes different development projects. Consequently, it is obvious that, if the SE movement has a strong identity in the broad sense and an organized body with the forums, it has also moments of tensions, conflicts and negotiations.

SE is posed in terms of an economic alternative, compared to the public sector and the private for-profit sector, through the explicit and asserted promotion, on the level of the discourse of the actors, of a set of values. These values are opposed, by the actors, to the capitalist modes of production, consumption and wealth distribution. The three most often advanced values, by the field actors but also by the authorities (*inter alia* the SENAES) and by the scientific literature, are the triplet of cooperation/solidarity/self-

management in the economic practices. *Self-management*<sup>11</sup> is considered as the *discriminating criterion of the SE membership*. Note that we are here at the level of the discourse carried out by the actors linked to the SE field, *i.e.* the way they recognize and identify themselves in the public sphere. Self-management is the manner they define their singularity *versus* the other economic actors. We are not talking here about the practices really developed inside the SE initiatives. We will examine such practices in the second part of the article.

Through the social movement, SE was constituted as a sector of its own and as a political actor. The social movement has the objective to advance SE as a true economic actor, carrying out benefits for the society and alternatives in front of the social and environmental problems generated by a liberal capitalism. We have seen that, through an articulation with the Labour Party reaching the national executive (with which the movement maintains a close connection), that led to the emergence of a *process of institutionalization* for these economic practices.<sup>12</sup> The public bodies recognized SE as a field of legitimate action and worthy of the interest of the State action, developing specific public policies for this field. Thus, the SENAES carried out since, often in partnership with the FBES, various actions and programs, registering ES as an instrument of work integration and fight against poverty (Singer, 2006).<sup>13</sup> Within the context of the social movement, SE public policies were also developed, and are still under development, at local levels and at the level of the Federated States. The discussion around SE as a strategy of development was also introduced into other spheres of the federal authorities and public institutions.

Finally let us note that the SE movement was initiated by a group of support organisations (NGOs, unions, university programs, churches,...) which then extended to other protagonists, in particular the proper SE initiatives. As Cleaver (2005) noted, social movements driven by the more deprived classes themselves are very rare. Indeed, the chronically poor do not have access to the material and immaterial resources (time, social capital, ability to tolerate risk, knowledge of the public debate and so on) required for engaging in political action whose mobilization, coordination and organization processes are asset-demanding. In the SE movement, as in the global justice movement and in other social movements (Bebbington, 2007), civil society

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<sup>11</sup> Self-management, in the economic domain, is the direct democracy in the sphere of work. It is about the participation in equal shares (one person - one voice, formal or not) of the labor factor, of the “executants”, in the collective management of the enterprise. It does not imply necessarily the ownership of the capital by the workers, which could be regarded as a factor external to the management (Razeto, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> Indeed, according to Bebbington (2007), social movements are not vehicles for addressing chronic poverty directly: they are instead “forms of political action that attack the social relationships underlying chronic poverty. [...] They] will pressure governments to adopt new chronic poverty reduction policies, will partner the government to implement new programmes, and will hold government and these policies to account” (p. 798).

<sup>13</sup> Since the new presidency of Dilma Vana Rousseff in January 2011, the maintenance of the SENAES is in discussion. It will probably depend of the ability of the SE movement to mobilise again, keeping unified its different roots...

support structures, as intermediary and facilitation organizations, have played a vital role in the construction of the identity of the movement, in the production of its project, in the formation, the projection and the relaying of its discourse and in the development of its political contacts.<sup>14</sup> The question of SE grassroots actors and practices can then be asked and will occupy us in the second part of this article.

## About the integration of the solidarity economy initiatives into the social movement

Networking and the constitution as social movement made it possible to make visible in the public sphere a whole set of economic practices which, although existing for a long time, were common in the people's districts, far removed from any public existence and from the access to public policies and resources.

**TABLE 2**  
**Historic overview of the construction of the SE "sector" in Brazil: an institutionalization process**

|                        |                        | Before and in 1980s   | In 1990s   | In 2000s   |
|------------------------|------------------------|---|--|--|
| <u>Public sphere</u>   | <b>Public debate</b>   | (People's cooperativism)<br>("Initiatives of work and income generation") | "SE initiatives"   | SE = self-management, cooperation, solidarity,... "an alternative model of development"  |
|                        | <b>Political actor</b> |   | Networking => <i>1<sup>st</sup> stage of political organization of the SE</i><br>=> DIVERSIFICATION OF THE SE INITIATIVES, HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL INTEGRATION |  |
|                        |                        |   |  | WSF: constitution of the SE social movement => <i>2<sup>nd</sup> stage of political organization of the SE</i><br>=> GROWTH AND SELECTION OF THE INITIATIVES |
| <u>Public policies</u> |                        |   |  | SENAES,... => <i>3<sup>rd</sup> political phase for the SE</i>   |

*Source:* summarised from Lemaître (2009a), p. 215.

<sup>14</sup> "As a result, such organizations tend to be the sources of counter-discourses and the generative ideas on which they are built." For these reasons, "even if movements are much more than organizations, they depend greatly on [such] formal 'social movement organizations'" (Bebbington, 2007: 800).

The strengthening of the political organization of the SE actors and its action in the public sphere led to a growth of the SE initiatives themselves (SIES, 2006). There are currently 21.859 SE initiatives in Brazil, with 1.687.496 members (SIES, 2011).

It is through the social movement that a set of “initiatives of work and income generation” started to recognize them as forming part of the “SE” world (Lemaître, 2009a). The most recent SE initiatives tend to form quasi automatically part of the SE movement, being for many born within this one or within the context of its emergence. But many existing people’s cooperatives did not integrate the movement, were not taking part in its networks and forums and did not recognize themselves as being SE initiatives.

As explained in the introduction, the third and last section of the article is dedicated to the analysis of the organizational practices developed by a sample of local people’s cooperatives, in order to see if the engagement in the SE social movement has an impact on these practices. Do the cooperatives participating into the movement combine work and income generation more strongly with a political dimension?

#### **4 In-depth analysis of people’s cooperatives in the state of Rio de Janeiro**

Beyond the political discourse carried by the SE movement, this section analyses how the practices of the people’s cooperatives contribute to local development. We present the main results of an analysis of a sample of people’s cooperatives ( $n=15$ ) of the deprived (and violent shantytowns) districts of the State of Rio de Janeiro.<sup>15</sup>

In order to study the potential impact of the integration into SE social movement, the sample of cooperatives has been stratified according this criterion. Half of the sample ( $n=8$ ) is composed by people’s cooperatives which are actively engaged in the SE movement, identifying themselves with and being recognized as SE initiatives. The other half of the sample ( $n=7$ ) is made up by people’s cooperatives which do not participate to the SE movement and do not consider themselves as being SE enterprises (mostly even do not know such terminology).

We collected an extensive and detailed set of quantitative and qualitative data on such cooperatives, according to the methodology of the in-depth case-studies. These data correspond to a large set of indicators related to the fulfilment of the objectives pursued, the governance structures developed and the resources mobilized, in accordance with the different dimensions of the multidimensional grid derived from a Polanyian understanding of the economy presented above. We also reconstituted, in a diachronical perspective, the genesis and the history or the evolutionary paths of these organizations (Lemaître, 2009a).

Then, we led, on our stratified sample, a cluster analysis based on this wide set of data related to the different dimensions of our multidimensional grid for

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<sup>15</sup> For much more detailed information, see Lemaître (2009a).

the analysis of the projects (as presented above in Box 1).<sup>16</sup> It resulted in two clearly identifiable clusters of subgroups of cooperatives, which we called namely “policy-driven” versus “market-driven” people’s cooperatives.

**TABLE 3**  
**Sample of people’s cooperatives in Rio de Janeiro**

|                         | NGO/Policy-driven | Market-driven | Total     |
|-------------------------|-------------------|---------------|-----------|
| Participating in SE     | 5                 | 3             | 8         |
| Non-participating in SE | 2                 | 5             | 7         |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>7</b>          | <b>8</b>      | <b>15</b> |

We present hereafter the two clusters of cooperatives, namely the NGO or policy-driven and the market-driven ones. We discuss them, regarding (1) their participation to the SE movement and (2) their contribution to local development, according to the Polanyian multidimensional grid for analysis of projects.

### **Policy-driven cooperatives**

The first cluster is composed by seven cooperatives born after a training given by one or several NGOs, sometimes in partnership with the local public authorities. They all are strongly supported by one (or several) NGO(s), issued from the “popular/solidary” political vision. Five of seven participate to the SE social movement and see themselves as SE enterprises.

Their economic dimension is fragile. These cooperatives are mostly informal and active in a handicraft production (in five cases). The demand for their products is not continuous and they face serious problems of commercialization, notably because of a lack of fixed sales outlets for their products. As a consequence, they generate very small and variable turnover, which varies from 8,100 to 54,111 reais per annum.<sup>17</sup>

They create few jobs: they are small cooperatives, ranging from 4 to 16 members. They generate variable and low incomes, often supplementary for the workers. The average monthly income per worker is in all cases below one minimum salary, usually without any other form of remuneration for the workers.

The cooperatives are all composed afro-descendants with very low levels of education, originating from the shantytowns and other very deprived and violent informal settlements. They are mostly women, aged over 40 years. They are the most disadvantaged workers of the sample.

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<sup>16</sup> The cluster analysis is a statistical classification method which minimizes the distances between the data (in our case, related to the organizations) in order to classify them in different groups (in our case, of organizations) contrasted one with the others (Everitt, 2011).

<sup>17</sup> The 31 of December 2008, 1 Brazilian real was equivalent to 0,31 euro or 0,43 US dollars.

While in dual Brazilian society, members of the popular class are highly stigmatized, through the integration into the cooperative, they acquire dignity at work. Generally, all the members see this as one of the main benefits of the organization: self-esteem and recognition (Honneth, 1996). The work atmosphere is friendly and the link between the workers is important.

For the women, one of the main benefits of their job is that it enables them to reconcile the private and the professional life. Indeed, the absence of formal child care solutions and the little time their children are at school make it difficult for these deprived women to get a job. In these cooperatives, the work time is flexible and, if they have children, they can take their handicraft work at home, being able to look after them.

The members of the cooperatives mention that it is important to consider every worker as a complete human and to feel responsible for him/her. For example, the cooperative encourages workers to pursue studies for personal development, beyond any instrumental function within the cooperative. Production activity is adapted to make this possible. For the policy-driven cooperatives, the economic activity does appear to be central: it is a means to empower workers (Charlier, 2006) and for them to access citizenship.

Indeed, the policy-driven cooperatives, which participate to the SE social movement and/or to others movements (of women, of waste collectors,...) develop a strong political dimension. They all state that they pursue a political objective, that they always place in the first or the second place compared to the production objective and to the creation of employment and income. Most of these cooperatives state that the values of the worker are more important than his/her technical capacities. The political dimension is shared by all the workers of the (small) cooperative.

Through the cooperative, the workers mention that they take gradually conscience of their capabilities and that they are able to depend on themselves. Beyond the professional training, they are also trained in citizenship, among others by NGOs. They become aware of their reality of economic, social and political exclusion. They progressively consider themselves as citizens, as social actors with duties and with entitlements for which they begin to militate together. They see themselves as “multiplier agents”, as having a mission to empower other persons through encounters and exchanges. We often see such cooperatives becoming the stimulator or the protagonist of some social cause concerning their community.

From a gender perspective, most women say that learning to speak in public and the awareness of their capabilities and entitlements influence in turn their family life and in particular how they position themselves *vis-a-vis* their husbands, to whom they often used to be in a submissive relation.

The relation with NGOs, the participation in social movements,... allows the members of the people’s cooperative to develop a set contacts outside their own community, which, in Brazil, used to be segregated and with violent private forms of power. They can then live democratic experiences, rare in the other spheres of their daily life. The insertion into the cooperatives of this first cluster allows them to construct an access to the public sphere, in the sense that “it is in the public sphere that citizens have access to the political information, that they can deliberate and form an opinion and that they can

choose the persons who will exercise political power. It is in the public sphere that the citizens feel not only recipients but also authors of this right” (Dacheux and Laville, 2003: 10). From a local development perspective, we can say that the policy-driven cooperatives participate to the creation of a *local political control*, being the local control defined as the ability to create “the lifestyle desired in the region” Nelson (1993: 28).

As Bebbington (2007) observed, some authors see chronic poverty as an economic problem of lack of resources, others see it more as a problem of lack of entitlements which can only be solved with political change. In that sense, authors about social movements stress that the poverty reduction does not simply require “good policy” but the empowerment and the mobilization of the deprived people, in order to create their ability to influence and to hold accountable those who make the policies. For them, “chronic poverty is an inherently political problem [...] Its persistence over time reflects its institutionalization within social and political norms and systems, its legitimation within political discourse and by political elites, and the failure of the poorest groups to gain political representation therein” (Hickey and Bracking, cited by Bebbington, 2007: 798). We will come back to this discussion in the conclusion of the article.

Two cooperatives of the first cluster produce ecological goods (waste sorting). All of them try to produce in an ecologically sustainable way, having the preservation of the environment as a functioning value.

Concerning the decision-making processes, in this first cluster, only three of the eight cooperatives do practice self-management *stricto sensu*, in the sense that they are totally managed, in equal parts, by the workers. These are the smallest organizations in the sample (and of the SE social movement). In the other five organizations of the cluster, there is a “leader”, sometimes called “self-managed popular leader”, who was a militant before the constitution of the cooperative and who takes the main decisions. He/She consider himself/herself as a necessary initial impulse and states that his/her position should disappear with time thanks to self-management trainings given to the members of the cooperative.

Indeed, these field actors develop a *processual* definition of the self-management. They mention that it implies voice and co-responsibility learning processes and that it is difficult to implement, even more so in a dual society like Brazil where the workers are not accustomed to the horizontal relationships that the self-management tries to stimulate. Calling for cultural changes, self-management is considered as “the horizon of the practices”, as an ideal which can only be implemented very gradually, through slow education and training processes. For them, in practice, it is the path travelled that is important (Mothé, 1980), the progressive learning of other, non-assistentialist, relationships.

In the policy-driven cooperatives, as well as in the ones of the second cluster of organizations that we will present hereafter, the rules for the distribution of revenue do not vary so much. For the two clusters, the revenue is distributed among the workers according to rules linked to the productivity (hours worked, condition of the contract signed with the client, piece

produced, skill level and so on). We did not observe much solidarity amongst workers in the revenue distribution of the cooperatives of the sample.

The external economic relations of the small and policy-driven people's cooperatives can be seen in following table 4. According to a substantive understanding of the economy, we made the inventory of all the resources mobilized by every organization in 2007, be the resources monetary or non-monetary.<sup>18</sup> Remember that, for the non-monetary resources, we valued them at their market price, in order to make visible all the resources that the enterprise uses to pursue its objectives. The sum of the monetary and of the non-monetary resources constitutes the total resources of the organization.

The resources from the *market* come from sales of goods and/or services. It is their gross revenue. The purchaser can be motivated only by market criteria, i.e. by the ratio between the quality and price of the product. But he/she can also be motivated by other criteria, as for example when he/she buys the product in order to sustain the project or according to other social, environmental or political criteria. In such case, the market relation is told to be *embedded* in social criteria (Granovetter, 1985). The cooperatives of this first cluster develop a low proportion of market resources (which represent on average 43% of their total resources) and these resources are in most cases embedded in social criteria.

The organizations of the cluster have few *reciprocity* resources (local voluntary work, local gifts and so on) when valued in monetary terms (on average 13% of the total resources). They do not cover *domestic administration* relations (arising from self-provisioning).

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<sup>18</sup> The reconstitution of the monetary and non-monetary resources mobilized by the cooperative in one year constituted a very laborious work. Indeed, the **monetary resources** of the cooperative can be: (1.1) sales of goods and services (-> *market resources*), (1.2) subsidies (-> *redistributive resources*), (1.3) monetary donations coming from the international cooperation (-> *redistribution, delegated or voluntary*, according to how the NGO is financed), (1.4) monetary donations embedded in social ties (-> *reciprocity resources*), (1.5) monetary donations and contributions issued from the members as well as their household (-> *domestic administration*) and (1.6) income from assets (-> *market resources*).

The **non-monetary resources** of the cooperative can be: (2.1) voluntary work embedded in social ties (-> *reciprocity resources*), (2.2) voluntary work issued from persons of the household of the members (-> *domestic administration*) and (2.3) non-monetary subsidies and aids. This last category includes labour force allowances (by instance, the accompanying services and training given by NGOs); capital allowances (space and equipment); donations in kind (as space and equipment, raw material, free transportation, etc.) and benefits of loans with low interest (inferior to the market interest rate). They can come (2.3.1) from the public bodies (-> *redistributive resources*), (2.3.2) from the international cooperation (-> *redistribution, delegated or voluntary*, according to how the NGO is financed), (2.3.3) from the local social ties (-> *reciprocity resources*) or (2.3.4) be issued from the members as well as their household (-> *domestic administration*).

**TABLE 4**  
**Resource mix of the policy-driven people's cooperatives in 2007 (in percentage of the total resources), as indicators of their external economic relations**

| INITIATIVES   | 1          | 2          | 3          | 4          | 5          | 6          | 7          | Average    |
|---|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| <b>EXTERNAL ECONOMIC RELATIONS IN %</b>                                   |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |
| <b>Market exchange</b>  | <b>25%</b> | <b>31%</b> | <b>48%</b> | <b>22%</b> | <b>49%</b> | <b>68%</b> | <b>60%</b> | <b>43%</b> |
| Market relations motivated only by the ratio quality/price                | 7%         | 0%         | 7%         | 22%        | 5%         | 14%        | 21%        | 11%        |
| Market relations motivated by social, environmental or political criteria | 17%        | 31%        | 41%        | 0%         | 44%        | 54%        | 39%        | 32%        |
| <b>Public redistribution</b>  | <b>35%</b> | <b>32%</b> | <b>15%</b> | <b>41%</b> | <b>16%</b> | <b>13%</b> | <b>28%</b> | <b>26%</b> |
| International cooperation (delegated redistribution)                      | 32%        | 31%        | 15%        | 28%        | 14%        | 12%        | 4%         | 19%        |
| Brazilian public funds  | 3%         | 1%         | 0%         | 13%        | 3%         | 1%         | 24%        | 7%         |
| SENAES  | 3%         | 1%         | 0%         | 0%         | 3%         | 1%         | 3%         | 2%         |
| Local public agencies   | 0%         | 0%         | 0%         | 13%        | 0%         | 0%         | 20%        | 5%         |
| <b>Voluntary redistribution</b>   | <b>34%</b> | <b>24%</b> | <b>10%</b> | <b>33%</b> | <b>9%</b>  | <b>8%</b>  | <b>3%</b>  | <b>18%</b> |
| <b>Reciprocity</b>  | <b>6%</b>  | <b>13%</b> | <b>27%</b> | <b>4%</b>  | <b>25%</b> | <b>10%</b> | <b>9%</b>  | <b>13%</b> |
| <b>Domestic administration</b>  | <b>0%</b>  |

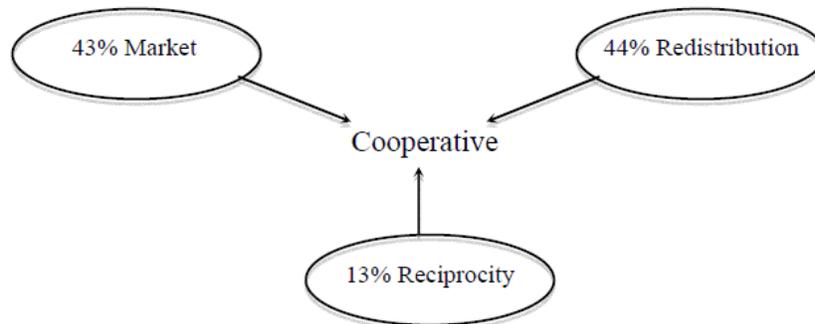
Source: Lemaître (2009a).

One important origin of the resources of these cooperatives is actually the *redistribution* (on average, 26% + 18% = 44% of the total resources). This concerns mainly delegated redistribution (19% of total resources) or voluntary redistribution (18% of total resources), it means funds passing through the support given by NGOs to the cooperatives. This support is, in almost all cases, in kind, mostly in the form of training and other accompanying services given to the cooperatives by the NGOs.

It is interesting to notice that, while the funds coming from the SENAES are symbolically very important for the enterprises—as they represent a new path of recognition and institutionalization for them—they do not actually weigh so much when compared to the ones coming from international cooperation. They constitute in fact a very low proportion (from 0% to 3%) of the monetary and non-monetary resources mobilized by the cooperatives.

Most authors situate the people's cooperatives between “the market and the gift” (Latouche, 1998), *i.e.* between the market and the local reciprocity. However, our study highlights the importance of the non-monetary resources emanating from the international development cooperation to the cooperatives. On average, the external economic relations of the enterprises of the first cluster can be represented as follows:

**FIGURE 2**  
**External economic relations of the small and policy-driven people's cooperatives (on average and in percentage of the total resources)**



We have seen that NGOs give the access to the cooperatives of this first cluster of redistributive resources (for an average on  $19\% + 18\% = 37\%$  of total resources). NGOs also sustain the cooperatives by buying their products. Indeed, on average, 33% of the market resources of these policy-driven cooperatives are actually sales of goods and services to NGOs. That is why we can say that NGOs play a major role in the development of the resources of such cooperatives.

### **Market-driven cooperatives**

The second cluster of people's cooperatives, which we labelled market-driven ones, consists of eight enterprises. Their foundation is less the product of the action of support agencies, as in the case of the policy-driven cooperatives, and more the fruit of the protagonism of the workers themselves. The market-driven cooperatives are more heterogeneous and much more autonomous of the support agencies, which are diverse, including universities, trade unions (the second root of the SE movement, with a "vanguardist/classist" political vision) and so on. Three of these cooperatives are engaged in the SE social movement, the remaining five are not.

These enterprises have a much stronger and more central economic dimension, than in the case of the policy-driven organizations. They are all formal and active in a diverse set of production domains (services to enterprises as cleaning and personal services, building, processing industry, computer services, handicraft and nursing). Generally they have a stable customer base, allowing a greater continuity in the flow of production. They generate higher and more stable turnovers, ranging from 117,000 to 1,250,000 reals per year.

The cooperatives of the second cluster are bigger. They create more jobs: ranging from minimum 20 to a maximum of 210 workers. They generate higher levels of income, which are more stable. For these enterprises, the average monthly income per worker exceeds, in every case, the minimum wage, with an average for the cluster of 496 reals (which in two cases includes payment of the transportation costs). Although highly disadvantaged, the

workers are slightly more qualified than those in the first cluster. There are more men, located at the edge between the popular class and the small, proletarianized, middle class, originating from the formal world of work.

The working conditions guarantee dignity at work. It is very often mentioned by the workers that their current work experience differs very significantly from their previous ones. Those who had work experience in the formal sector described working conditions there as being particularly hard.

The group dynamics are much less important in the cooperatives of this cluster than in the case of the policy-driven ones. As the cooperatives in terms of workers are larger, the links between them are less strong and the atmosphere is less amicable. The production activity is more professionalized. The enterprises are less flexible: there are schedules to meet and there is more formalization. These cooperatives are less open to external relations and do not appear so much embedded in a local community as in the case of the policy-driven ones.

The market-driven cooperatives do not develop a strong political dimension. The ones which do not participate to any social movement explain that they do not have a political objective. The ones engaged into the SE movement state that they pursue a political goal but this one is carried only by members of the Board of directors. It is not shared by all the workers, who sometimes do not even know about the existence of such objective. Only members of the Board participate to the meetings of the SE movement and any feedback information to the other workers is not guaranteed. The directors state that the SE forums are “more adapted to the small cooperatives active in the handicraft”, which are said to be “not always conscious of the economic constraints”.

In such bigger enterprises, the majority of the workers do not consider themselves as militants and do not claim alternative economic values. Inside the cooperatives, there are no education processes of the workers to the citizenship and no political dynamics of construction of their access to the public sphere. The training provided to the workers is much more a professional one. It deals very rarely with questions of entitlements and with global issues of society. The focus at the heart of the cooperatives (including for the members of the Board of directors of the cooperatives engaged in the SE movement) is on the employment and revenue creation for excluded persons (in a non assistentialist perspective) with a transformation of the labour relationships towards the implementation of decent working conditions, respectful of the human being. In local development terms, we can say that the market-driven cooperatives are more engaged towards the construction of a *local economic control*.

Compared to the policy-driven cooperatives, the market-driven ones do not pay much attention to the environmental dimension: none is active in the production of ecological goods and only one pays attention to produce in an ecologically sustainable way.

Concerning the decision-making processes of such enterprises, a characteristic of this second cluster is that no one practices self-management, not even in a processual understanding. This is true even for the ones that participate in the SE movement and that then place self-management as a key

criterion of such membership. In such cases, there is no congruence between the SE militant speech and their own organizational practices.

All the cooperatives of the second cluster are composed by General Assemblies where the workers, with equal parts, elect representatives (according to the rule “one worker–one voice) in a Board of directors to whom they delegate the power of taking the daily management decisions. All these enterprises follow the more traditional principles of the cooperativism and of the representative worker’s democracy.

When the composition of the Board of directors or of another applicable governance structure varies little or not at all in the history of the organization, those who carry the initiative consider this as a constraint linked to a lack of involvement of the workers, even though the latter have equal power to elect their decision-making bodies. In the first cluster of cooperatives, the public-driven ones, we have seen that these organisations develop a processual approach of the economic democracy, in the sense that it is considered as an ideal to be implemented very gradually through education processes (Mothé, 1980). We can say that, in this second cluster of cooperatives, we found again,

**TABLE 5**  
**Resource mix of the market-driven cooperatives in 2007 (in percentage of the total resources), as indicators of their external economic relations**

| Initiatives  | 8    | 9   | 10   | 11  | 12  | 13  | 14  | 15  | Average |
|--|------|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|---------|
| External economic relations in %   |      |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |         |
| The market   | 87%  | 98% | 84%  | 98% | 94% | 88% | 74% | 91% | 89%     |
| Market relations motivated only by the ratio quality/price                     | 52%  | 98% | 67%  | 98% | 66% | 0%  | 74% | 90% | 68%     |
| Market relations motivated also by social, environmental or political criteria | 35%  | 0%  | 17%  | 0%  | 28% | 88% | 1%  | 1%  | 21%     |
| The public redistribution  | 5%   | 0%  | 1%   | 2%  | 0%  | 0%  | 20% | 0%  | 4%      |
| International cooperation (delegated redistribution)                           | 4%   | 0%  | 0,5% | 0%  | 0%  | 0%  | 5%  | 0%  | 1%      |
| Brazilian public funds   | 1%   | 0%  | 0,3% | 2%  | 0%  | 0%  | 15% | 0%  | 2%      |
| SENAES   | 0,4% | 0%  | 0%   | 0%  | 0%  | 0%  | 0%  | 0%  | 0%      |
| Local public agencies  | 0,2% | 0%  | 0,3% | 2%  | 0%  | 0%  | 15% | 0%  | 2%      |
| The voluntary redistribution   | 3%   | 1%  | 0%   | 0%  | 1%  | 0%  | 6%  | 0%  | 1%      |
| The reciprocity  | 5%   | 1%  | 15%  | 0%  | 5%  | 12% | 0%  | 9%  | 6%      |
| The domestic administration  | 0%   | 0%  | 0%   | 0%  | 0%  | 0%  | 0%  | 0%  | 0%      |

Source: Lemaître (2009a).

when we go to the practices really developed, a *processual approach of the economic democracy*. In this case, it is the indirect economic democracy which is understood as having to be learned and trained, progressively, under the impetus of some leaders. It is not so obvious for the workers, shaped by other proletarian working relationships.

The external economic relations of the stronger and market-driven people's cooperatives can be seen in table 5 (adopting the same methodology as in the case of the first cluster of cooperatives).

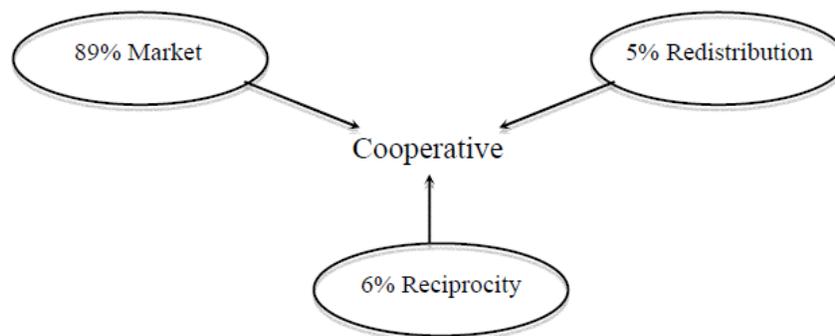
These cooperatives are clearly market-driven, as evidenced by a high share of market revenues in the total of their total resources (89% on average). And, in most of the cases, these relations are only motivated by the ratio price-quality of the product, *i.e.* without buying being encouraged by social or political criteria.

Most of these cooperatives of this cluster develop few *reciprocity* relations. On average, only 6% of their total resources come from reciprocity. These cooperatives also do not engage in self-provisioning drawing on the *domestic administration* logic.

Finally, apart from one cooperative which is supported by the local public authority, these organizations have, in relative terms, very few *redistributive* resources. The ones engaged in the SE movement do not receive any significant funds from the SENAES. All the cooperatives of this second cluster enjoy very little support from international development cooperation, be it delegated or voluntary, and have never benefitted from this through their history.

We can summarize the external economic relations of these cooperatives as follows.

**FIGURE 3**  
**External economic relations of the stronger and market-driven cooperatives (on average and in percentage of the total resources)**



The literature often relates cases of little “fusion” self-managed initiatives which progressively transformed, with time, into bigger cooperatives, that do not practice self-management anymore (Fortin, 1985). It is then interesting to notice that, in our sample, it is not the case. Indeed, from an historical point of view, the first cluster of organizations is not the origin of the second, neither

will the second be the future of the first. We are not dealing with initially self-managed initiatives, sustained by the international development cooperation, which would have gradually grown, professionalized, strengthened economically and transformed into bigger cooperatives more independent from the international cooperation. The two clusters are rather different, with different roots, active in different fields, with different organizational practices which did not change much over time.

Table 6 below summarizes the results of the in-depth analysis of the organizational practices of a set of people's cooperatives in the State of Rio de Janeiro, using the clustering method.

**TABLE 6**  
**Main results of the in-depth analysis of the organizational practices: the policy-driven versus the market-driven cooperatives**

| INITIATIVES                               | Policy-driven coops (n=7)  | Market-driven coops (n=8)   |
|---|--|---|
| <b>ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES</b>           |  |   |
| <b>Achievements</b>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Economic activity as a means</li> <li>- Small groups, flexible work</li> <li>- Fragile creation of work and income</li> <li>- Mostly women</li> <li>- Empowerment processes and access of workers to the public sphere</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Economic activity strong and central</li> <li>- Bigger groups and professionalization</li> <li>- Better and stable creation of work and income</li> <li>- More men, slightly more qualified workers</li> <li>- Dignity at work but no empowerment processes for the workers</li> </ul> |
| => Contribution to local development      | => Construction of a <i>local political control</i>  | => Construction of a <i>local economic control</i>  |
| <b>Governance structures</b><br>(Workers) | Self-management ( <i>stricto sensu</i> or according to a processual dimension)   | Cooperativism, representative democracy ( <i>stricto sensu</i> or according to a processual definition)   |
| <b>External economic relations</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Non-market organizations</li> <li>- Importance of international development cooperation, through the crucial role played by supporting NGOs</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Market-driven organizations</li> <li>- Not supported by public policies and much more autonomous from support agencies</li> </ul>  |

Source: Lemaître (2009a).

### **Engagement into the SE movement does not completely define the economic practices**

In practice, we found much more diverse organizational forms and economic practices than what is presented by the SE movement discourse about its grassroots initiatives. This heterogeneity applies also for the criteria concerning self-management, which can take different forms inside the initiatives of the SE movement and which even does not appear in the bigger cooperatives. The

centrality of economic activity to the SE organizations, as well as of the market and the public policies, vary also inside the movement.

That is why we cannot conclude that *the engagement in the SE social movement defines completely economic practices* developed by SE initiatives. The two distinct groups of cooperatives, which clearly emerged from the cluster analysis, cannot be explained by their participation into the SE social movement (as we find five cooperatives engaged in the SE movement in the first cluster and three in the second cluster). The clusters, and thus the organizational practices developed, appear to be rather function of the support to the initiative rendered by a NGO, *i.e.* its inscription into the policies of the international development cooperation. The innovative aspect of the SE seems then mainly constituted by the constitution of a political actor in the public sphere through the construction of a social movement, and less by new dynamics in the grassroots initiatives themselves. We should be reminded however that this research is exploratory: the sample is small, the in-depth case-studies allow us to make emerge new research hypotheses but the results cannot be generalized.

## 5 Conclusion

We presented in this article the results of a research in Brazil about the solidarity economy following a methodology of substantive economics developed by Polanyi (1944). The research included two parts. The first develops an historical and institutional analysis of the construction of the SE sector in Brazil. It provided the basis to advance the hypothesis that, more than a set of existing economic practices, the SE represents today in Brazil a social movement, calling for local control and a corresponding institutional change in the economy. This political and meso level of analysis is very important to understand the dynamics carried by the SE, which represents a new institutionalization path for the poor neighbourhoods which in the past used to be far removed from any public existence.

In our attempt to characterize the SE in Brazil, we undertook in a second step in connecting the political and the economic dimensions, which often tend to remain separated in the analysis about the SE. We analyzed, in-depth, the organizational practices of people's cooperatives in the State of Rio de Janeiro. Two groups of cooperatives clearly emerged from the cluster analysis, showing that the integration of the cooperative into the SE social movement does not completely define its economic practices. The basis, the economic practices of the grassroots initiatives, appears in fact to be more heterogeneous than what is presented by the political discourse.

From a local development point of view, we found that the cooperatives participate to the construction of their territory either by increasing local political control (empowerment and participation of workers in the public domain) or by expanding local economic control, with certain tensions between both dimensions.

Then, from the two clusters of cooperatives studied, emerged *different understandings of the solidarity and of the reduction of social inequalities*. The first one is linked to the *generation of more security for workers*, looking for more stability, and less casual employment and income. A second one is related to the *access of the*

*workers to the public domain*, which means their ability to carry a voice, firstly, in the domain of work (through which they gain access to public life) and, secondly, in the public sphere in general.

According to Bhalla and Lapeyre (2004), the question of inclusion goes beyond the one of the access to material living conditions: it has to include, beyond the economic dimension, also a social dimension, linked to relational aspects and the insertion into sociability networks. Our study could lead to incorporate, moreover, a political dimension to this concept of inclusion, namely the access to the public sphere for the deprived populations themselves.

Inclusion would then be understood as a process that has (1) an economic dimension—in distributional terms, linked to work and income— (2) a social dimension—in relational and recognition terms, linked to the inclusion in social relationships and other social cohesion issues—and (3) a political dimension—linked to the inclusion in the citizenship domain, leading to the possibility of carrying a voice in the public sphere and of carrying weight in the making of societal choices. The reduction of the inequalities is not only a question of reducing material vulnerability or of securing employment and of integration in social networks, it relates also to the power relationships, democratic construction issues and the capacity of the various social groups to produce and control their own history.

We have to think about frameworks that have the ability to analyse the reduction of all these inequalities as “all these axes of injustice cross in a manner which affects the interests and the identities of each one” (Fraser, 2004: 157). None of these dimensions seems to be sufficient for itself, since the inequalities are mixed, of an economic, social or political nature, and that they tend to reinforce one another.

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