

Partial Document – only parts of the text relatives to consumption

3. Emerging Concepts

The concepts discussed in the following section emerged from different exchanges during the Meeting: lectures delivered by invited panel members, debates in the plenary sessions, and group work.

1) *The Solidarity Market*

Besides the hegemonic capitalist market, there are other markets that coexist with it. Our challenge is exactly the organization of those other markets of popular profile with solidarity, as a venue for fair and responsible exchange relations among citizens - producers and consumers - who consider themselves as actors and builders of the economy of solidarity, as a space for the satisfaction of human needs and desires. This organization implies the building/expansion of spaces where many other exchange relations can be established, among the numerous economic experiences that integrate the economy of solidarity.

When building these spaces, we must create and strengthen the socio-economy networks of solidarity starting from consumption – through reorganization and *conscientization* – and from the local to the national. It also implies developing their own logistics aiming at interfering in the productive chains as a whole, from consumption to production, considering the products and services to be offered, the symbology that identifies them to the consumer, the credibility on these networks and the confidence in their products, their creativity, credit, legislation and entrepreneurship.

Principles of the market of solidarity: provide sustainable improvement of quality of life for all parts, practice transparency in prices; distribute and circulate the income; stimulate the creation of job opportunities.

Concept: it is not a hegemonic market. Organized on the basis of other relations, understood as the subordinate part of a set of social relations. The solidarity market is the space to satisfy human needs, creating a healthy atmosphere of economic relations among citizens/producers/consumers.

Components: producer, consumer, logistics (distribution); training; price/purchasing power; products/services; quality; quantity; market levels (local,

regional, state, national, and international); legislation; symbology (logotype); remuneration; currency (official and community) among others.

Strategies:

Start from consumers' needs, integrating them in the supply of products and services from the enterprises.

- * Reorganize consumption from local to national.
- * Strengthen the networks through the organization of consumption and productive chains.
- * Emphasize the profile of the market as social relationships serving human objectives, greater than themselves and higher than the accumulation of material wealth.

Possibilities

- * Discuss the productive chain and restructure it with solidarity
- * Develop and share data base on products
- * Integrate producer and consumer in interpersonal relations.
- * Create the brand/seal to identify the products from the market of solidarity.

Orientation: the local market should be the priority, the conditioning, the starting point for the reorganization of other spheres of the market of solidarity.

Production, Marketing and Consumption of Solidarity

We must think about the production process starting from consumption and demand, not from supply. It is a strategic mistake to concentrate attention on production and on work without a similar effort to understand and organize consumption, since it is the final purpose of production. With a systematic research, it is possible to set up an information system to organize production, distribution and consumption based on real demands. However, a large number of solidarity enterprises begin by production and then look for someone to buy their products and services. And many of them do not reach a minimum level of sales and end up bankrupted.

We must stop being amateurs. It is necessary to understand productive chains and design strategies to interfere on their different segments, defining what, for whom and how to produce.. We have an enormous *productive base* around the whole country, but it is not well used. It is vital to make diagnosis of the enterprises, in order to integrate them in networks through the organization of consumers and producers, which, among other things, will allow the acquisition of implements in groups, reduction of marketing costs, shared use of infrastructure, collective reinvestment of the surplus, and recycling of refuse, enabling the restructuring of productive chains of solidarity. Special attention should be given to the issue of

surplus. The problem of capitalism is not that of generating surplus, but its private and exclusionary concentration. It is necessary, therefore, to generate surplus and share them so that through collective reinvestments we can restructure the productive chains under the focus of the economy of solidarity. Thus, when thinking about economy of solidarity on the basis of the local reality and its organic growth potential, we will also project its impact on the general economy.

Consumers should be considered in the center. The economic power must be based on consumers, otherwise we run the risk of forming new corporations instead of cooperative enterprises and markets of solidarity. After all, we are all consumers, including the unemployed population. We must work with research, carrying out systematized surveys of what we consume and produce in terms of volume and diversity, identifying stable demands and who could consume a certain product. By analogy to what occurs in our productive base, our social base is enormous as a consumer segment and has not been well used in terms of purchasing power. In this segment are included the labor and popular movements, for example, and in many places the State itself demands products and services which Therefore, we should build an economy around consumption needs, emphasizing the ethical aspect and the economic advantages that may be brought by the practice of solidarity consumption to all the organized segments with which we interact in the democratic and popular fields. And, from then on, produce in an adequate form, according to the demands, planning integrated actions in the best possible way.

As far as capitalist enterprises are concerned, by seducing desires and massively manipulating and standardizing imaginaries, they orient consumption and organize production, using as reference the detailed diagnosis of demands and peculiarities of the different segments of consumers. In the case of youth, for example, the capitalist market, understanding them as a niche where certain products can be sold, invests in persuading them to buy since their early childhood, using different media to bombard them with fetish, logotypes and the culture of consumerism.

We should not reproduce this capitalist form of treating consumers as a number or scale, simply by changing the logo on the products. We should not treat consumers as a massively homogeneous "whole", since we are not the same. The consumer is not a statistic figure, but a person with peculiarities; with a face. It is proper to think of a consumer as a living organism, with all of his/her inherent complexity and singularity.

When thinking about a policy to reach the consumer, it is essential that we elaborate a distribution policy in order to guarantee for the consumer an easy and comfortable access to our products and services. The distribution logistics is therefore a big challenge to be confronted, making the products accessible to consumers and guaranteeing the marketing in larger scale, reducing the necessary costs and eliminating the unnecessary and speculative intermediation (middle man).

Presently, there is a great concentration of power in the hands of distributors. Big commercial businesses, with their chains, are always uniting against small businesses and even organize campaigns against consumption cooperatives. Often they adopt monopolistic prices and cartel practices. Transnational producers and distributors follow straitening corporative strategies; with well-known practices of tax evasion, fiscal *dumping* encouragement, and attempts to (legally or illegally) transfer the major part of their surplus to foreign countries, to the detriment of the local and national economies.

On our part, considering the marketing as something positive and not necessarily as a parasitical type of activity, we must think about other distribution networks, paying special attention to small snack places, bars, vegetable stores, neighborhood stores and markets – which are often family businesses and buy their articles in large markets for resale. One possibility we should not disregard is that they may integrate in distribution and marketing networks of solidarity, selling the production of our enterprises. Another possibility is to have en-aisle displays of products of solidarity in neighborhood stores in general. In this case, an organic food staples basket, for example, can be created and offered to sell at different selling points of similar products. As to the practice of street markets, we observed that in the beginning they mobilize a lot of people but, along time they gradually become emptied out, if there is no on-going consciousness-raising effort towards producers and consumers, associated to the technical competence in the diverse activities of the chain. We have to use better – and in our own way – all the available commercial instruments we have, among which are included telesales, electronic sales and direct sales. We can create networks with professional quality and place the products in the market with a support structure for solidarity advertising, carrying out training for small businessmen and capacity-building for unemployed workers concerning different commercial practices.

Today, the fundamental aspect of the relations with the consumer is information. This is the weak point of the system, but also the most difficult for us to work out. There is great need for consistent information which may lead consumers to understand and practice a critical and ethical consumption of solidarity products. Small markets of the MST (The Landless Movement), for example, may fail, because they demands a lot of investment on information in order to reach urban centers and mobilize consumers to buy their products. On the other hand, the difficult access for many consumers who, although motivated, have to “travel across the whole city” to get to the store, makes this purchase unfeasible. Finally, also as a consequence of this need, our few stores of solidarity commerce, even if they offer cheaper and better quality products, do not attract people, since they want to consume brand name products, led by desires, emotions, projections, erotic fantasies and other resources used by publicity campaigns in the market.

When we look for distribution channels, such as the “alternative” markets, we must be very careful not to reproduce the traditional relations we intend to overcome. With quality information and well prepared educational campaigns, we will have the opportunity to generate a critical mass, denouncing the “traditional” and the

disposable, and valuing our products and services as well as the logic of solidarity. Professionals or agents from the area of communications, however, can hardly absorb the innovative proposals we present, which may result in fatal errors in the conception and execution of advertising activities regarding the products and their elaboration, such as the images of fairs (markets) appearing in the media, where small farmers are shown as a poor nobody and there is no information to consumers about the different possibilities of the fair (or street market) as a space in which there may be interactions in several manners between producers and consumers present there, in addition to buying the products. It is not enough to stimulate and mobilize through advertising campaigns. We must educate, raise consciousness, modify bad consumer habits and generate a demand for the products offered – as in the case of organic products – which can really guarantee the well-being of consumers.

Consumers must know what they are consuming and what is the meaning of their consumer actions. In that sense, labels are a very important political instrument, and should be honest and educational, specifying not only the validity and other qualities of the product, but also the solidarity and ecological aspects involved. The existence of a logotype (brand name) to identify the products and services from the socio-economy of solidarity – besides a careful presentation of our merchandise, with quality (packaging, appearance, etc.) – will greatly contribute to disseminate the concept of solidarity consumption, which aims at guaranteeing not only the well-being of consumers, but of producers, since consumption has an impact over the whole productive chain and also over the ecosystems.. Presently, in Europe, there are interesting experiences disseminating the critical consumption, and they elaborated catalogs that contain lots of information on the products and enterprises, enabling the ethical consumption. Without flows of honest, educational and transparent information, there are no flows of fair trade with solidarity.

When we adjust the production considering the consumer in his/her concrete reality, we have better chances of success. The majority of people have little money, consuming only the essential. Thus, the composition of quality and price must be adequate to the demand, neither better, nor worse than what is required, and the items to be initially produced should be essential. However, if these consumers buy jointly, in groups, a total of larger demands and amounts, and form consumer groups or cooperatives for community purchases, with solidarity, the discounts obtained will turn into a real increment in the purchasing power of their wages, and will allow them to buy more and better products with the same resources, that is, improving the quality and quantity of the products acquired.

Finally, we cannot lose sight of not only the valorization of the local production, the regional culture, and the ecological aspect, but also the social cost of submitting labor and consumption to the requirements of the market, as well as the need to develop adequate technologies for low environmental impact during the productive process.

6 Singular Interventions on Diagnosis, Concepts and Cooperation

. The following section will present some singular interventions made in different plenary sessions, which deal with, discuss, or synthesize some recurrent ideas of the debate or add new analytical elements to the addressed issues.

- Consumption and Production

- * We are all consumers. Nevertheless, our collective consumption, which could be our great strength, is in fact a weakness, because we do not organize ourselves as men and women, citizens, and consumers.
- * Under the viewpoint of an ethical consumption, a great opportunity is to reach the grassroots of all the trade union, popular, community movements, that is, all the organized movements. If there is an ethical consciousness in these people about their consumer power, we can create the conditions to assure the flow of the production of solidarity in the market.
- * Social valorization of products of solidarity. Many times, we think about the product under the economic viewpoint. But, in fact, behind each product there is a story, a collective, people, names, labor, and lives. This social understanding of the product is something very important for the dissemination of the ethical consumption. As long as people cannot perceive that there is a difference between these two packs of noodles, since one comes from a multinational and the other from our community groups who are living off this work, as long as this social awareness about products does not exist, it will be difficult to develop the ethical consciousness about consumption.

Marketing (Commercialization)

- * There are some small businesses in our cities which are not able to dispute with the big businessmen, hypermarkets, and commercial retail multinationals, and consequently their situation is increasingly difficult. If we were able to work out an integration. with those commercial outlets, with an ethical perspective of solidarity, we may have new spaces for marketing our products.
- * National mobilization around fair trade. There are several international marketing networks of solidarity. In Brazil, there are groups of producers who sell abroad through those networks, receiving from them a pre-financing for production. We can equally disseminate this same practice of trade within the country. If a group from Minas Gerais, for example, is able to sell their products in Milan, why can't we sell them in Brazilian cities?

Productive Chain, Communication and Logo

- * We, workers, generally ignore the productive chain in which our products and

services are inserted as well as its diverse elements. For this reason, we did not create the necessary connections among the enterprises in the several spots of the productive chain. Sometimes, we have a farmer producing something in the country side which serves as an input for another producer in the city. But, in the city, the producer buys that input in the supermarket, paying much more for it, whereas the rural producer has no one to sell to. Without connecting ourselves in this productive chain, we will continue to be weak and dependant.

- * Lack of communication. Sometimes, within the same region, some enterprises are facing similar difficulties, and could develop joint actions to confront them, but since one does not know about the other there is no integration among them.
- * Absence of a common identity, a logo. If we had a brand name identifying our products all over the country, we would be able to provide visibility to the economy of solidarity. However, we do not have a label or logo, something that represents our identity, which features are the fair trade with solidarity, the ecological concern and the promotion of the ethical consumption..

Solidarity Market

- * We must consider the *market* as a social relation, a relationship among human beings and not only a material or monetary exchange. The market came into being before capitalism and will continue to exist after it. That is why we need to think about the market in a historical context, considering the real possibilities of overcoming the capitalist form of organization of market economy.
- * The competence of cooperative enterprises to efficiently dispute the capitalist market is important. But a lot more important is to develop a strategy to broaden the market of solidarity through an increasing complementary exchange with solidarity among cooperative and associative enterprises. Building productive chains and horizontal networks to connect enterprises from the sectors of production of goods and services, marketing, finances and consumption of solidarity is the most efficient way to implement this strategy.

7. Strategy

WHO WE ARE

We are a historical block still being formed, which is confronting the system and the capitalist globalization with a project of building an alternative bottom-up economy – the socio-economy of solidarity – centered upon the values of emancipated work, cooperative ownership and management of the means of production, in order to produce wealth and reproduce life. Also with the purpose of educating the subjects

of their own personal and social development, fighting any form of oppression and exploitation: economic, political or cultural.

We are not disputing the representation of this historical block. We are simply a part of it, interconnected in a collaborative form and even in confrontation with other parts of this same block.

WHAT IS OUR QUEST AND HOW TO ACHIEVE IT

To intervene in the whole economic process, strategically occupying the growing economic space, integrating production, marketing, consumption, and credit as a harmonious and interdependent system, collectively/democratically planned and managed, which serves the common objective of meeting the needs of survival and sustainable reproduction of life of all men and women citizens in all dimensions, including in the realms of culture, art and leisure.

Expansion through the building of productive chains vertically and horizontally integrated, of producers-consumers networks which act in cooperation and solidarity and constitute a growing space for socio-economy of solidarity within capitalism itself and in opposition to it.

Organize and strengthen local and regional networks that may connect their experiences and provide visibility to the socio-economy of solidarity. Organize the networks within the local level. Interconnect, disseminate, and organize, from the local base towards the sub-regional, regional, national and international levels. Such multidimensional organization should be worked out simultaneously and in an articulated way, integrating different practices of socio-economy of solidarity, popular movements, trade union movements, ODS and other organizations from the civil society that share the same spirit of solidarity.

Create instruments and mechanisms, such as the quality seal (logos) and others, in order to strengthen the network identity and the trust of the consumers, as well as instruments for financing, technological training and integration of knowledge within the network, as, for example, centers for technological training, research and management.

Communication is a fundamental and strategic condition for building networks. We should establish communication about general issues and also specific issues from each local, sector or movement as well as their exchanges, organizing dialog and networking spaces for the different actors involved. We should maximize the use and the extension of computer science in order to strengthen communications: make an effort to provide computers for the popular bases, disseminating *free programs of solidarity*, creating or reinforcing Internet sites. We must also multiply different forms of communication in order to integrate producers and consumers, promoting ethical consumption and fair trade with solidarity, providing publicity for products and services of solidarity and helping educate those who already are or

may be consumers of your products.

Providing Education for producers is also of vital importance. Learning happens through doing, practicing and participating, in a broader sense, appropriating the knowledge that will meet our needs and will guarantee better performance for our organizations and will improve self-management, with the participation of all. The networks should think about how to solve their own educational demands with their own resources.

. While building our networks we will also find conflicts, and in order to overcome them we must take into account the local level and have a broad democratic participation. Crises and conflicts are important moments to discuss and share knowledge. In Chinese the word CRISIS means risk and opportunity. We should set aside power disputes under the old viewpoint of centralism, so that we can grow under the new perspective of decentralized solidarity.

We must recover the knowledge that exists in the different actions of popular economy, create and appropriate new sustainable technologies, as well as re-educate our conception of time, defining when, how and where we want to arrive. Socio-economy of solidarity was born at the grassroots of many popular organizations and from people committed to historical groups, trade unions, and popular parties. The disorganized and marginalized population however, has another way of controlling time, with their immediate urgencies and processing slowness.

While conceiving and executing this strategy we cannot disregard the difficulties found when we have to establish the co-responsibilities which integrate countless organizations and diverse historical processes.

When organizing networks it is necessary to make the collective self-management viable, which requires the formulation of management policies for this purpose. As possible forms of organization of this self-management, the networks integrate enterprises and local organizations which may, among other possibilities, establish fora, state networks and form committees at different levels, including the regional and national scope.

We should not overlook the possibilities and difficulties involved in acting in face of the State, and in some cases there may be partnerships or punctual agreements, and in other cases resistance or pressure attitudes. With regards to the State, the strategy must consider four aspects upon which we must act: 1) Cooperative legislation: proposing alterations in the bill currently under discussion in Congress – number of participants, taxation, promotion and credit, withdrawal of labor impediments, autonomy of representation; 2) Credit: aiming at official credit lines with appropriate interest rates for social enterprises; and, supported by public funding in order to create enterprises of cooperative credit and savings of solidarity. 3) Opportunity: access, in due time, to public bidding for the supply of goods and services to the State 4) Public policies aimed at promoting social

enterprises.

Within this strategy, we outlined objectives and actions of general scope, as well as short-term (up to one year), medium-term (up to 5 years) and long-term ones (up to 10 years), in the areas of production, marketing, consumption, communication and credit.

1) PRODUCTION

General

- * Guarantee a broad diversity of products and services.
- * Quality and qualification: carefully monitor the quality of products (form and content).
- * Collective purchase of inputs in order to reduce costs.
- * Rebuild the productive chains with solidarity, starting as much as possible by the consumption area.
- * Network commitment to the consumer – sustained offer
- * Respect for the environment
- * Seal of social/environmental responsibility.
- * Establish emancipated work, knowledge and creativity of workers as the central value of the Socio-Economy of Solidarity system, organizing the enterprises and relations around this central value.
- * Self-management as a way to empower the labor force to control the productive process and the product of their work. Complementarity and solidarity as means to connect with other associative and cooperative enterprises.
- * Incorporate, create and share sustainable technologies.

Short-Term

- * Identify and map existing groups, based on data base in function (Banco Geração/Fase, Unitrabalho, Recopa, FCP-RJ, etc.) and other instruments, in order to better integrate productive chains.
- * Create regional and national Data Base which can map local production and consumption networks – resources from public authorities and partnerships. Broaden the National Base as much as possible, in order to include an international dimension and facilitate exchange with enterprises of solidarity from other countries and continents.

Medium-Term

- * Organize local networks as an experiment, using research-action as the methodology for analysis.

Medium- and Long-Term

- * Create an office for consultants of solidarity (composed of professionals, volunteers and interns) in order to subsidize the development of specific themes: self-management, methodology for networks and productive chains of solidarity, legislation, taxation, publicity, administration, sociology, agronomy, etc.

2) MARKETING

General

- * Always mind the quality, the packaging and the freight, matching costs with social and ecological sustainability.
- * Possibility of sharing the rent of *containers*, in order to facilitate the export.
- * Produce a catalog of products, services and suppliers.
- * Find out the needs of consumers and producers.
- * Develop logistics of solidarity for distribution and storage.
- * Cultivate the producer-consumer relationship.
- * While building productive chains of solidarity, try to maximize the cooperation among producers and consumers, eliminating as much as possible the middle man who exploits. The guaranty of an efficient intermediation is beneficial for both producers and consumers. It should be based on principles of cooperation and solidarity.
- * Observe the capitalist marketing mechanisms, in order to overcome them (appropriate whatever is positive and creatively surpass it) through fair marketing and solidarity.
- * Correctly manage information, since the greatest trump of the middle man is not transportation, but information.
- * Understand the solidarity links among the different services between producer and consumer as part of the building process of productive chains of solidarity.
- * Organize permanent markets (marketing outlets).

Short-Term

- * Encourage the creation of RBSES fairs and markets, from the local to the national.
- * Identify and map the buying and selling potential of existing groups and organizations.
- * Establish a stand for the Network, during the international meeting on cooperativism, which will be held in Rio de Janeiro.

Medium Term

- * Elaborate a practical guide with instructions about how to organize fairs at the local, regional and national levels (planning, management and fund raising).
- * Coordinate the Network's participation in events and fairs, in order to promote it, and take down the orders for products and services of the Network (this can be done through a second degree cooperative within the Network).

- * Long-Term

- * Put pressure on the National Congress to reformulate and elaborate legislation in the areas of taxation, inspection, and the like.
- * Find means to overcome transportation difficulties.

3) CONSUMPTION

General

- * Organize consumers' networks.
- * Consider ourselves as people and organizations who take part in networks, with our potential for demand as consumers to be satisfied.
- * Special attention to be given to packaging, avoiding pollution and making it easier and practical for the consumer, and including information about the products.
- * Organize points of exchange and distribution.
- * Carry out educational advertising.
- * Planning should integrate production-demand.
- * Quality control of products and services, in order to satisfy the consumers.
- * Development of new products.

Short-Term

- * Identify and map the consumption potential of existing groups within the Network.
- * Do the same thing with all the social and governmental organizations which harmonize with the socio-economy of solidarity (trade unions, schools, universities, churches, hospitals, residents associations, several popular organizations, participatory governments, etc.)
- * Promote sensitizing workshops at the local level in order to create Clubs for Solidarity Exchange (or Trade) as a practice of consumption of solidarity.

Medium-Term

- * Offer orientation for the creation of consumers/producers groups at the local, regional and national levels.

Long-Term

- * Promote education for consumption of solidarity, beginning with the existing groups in the network.