

Beyond Growth Worship: indicators of real wealth

Date and venue: Jan 30 2005 (12 am to 3pm) – room I204

Coordination: Laurent Fraise (Workgroup on Solidarity Socio-Economy, France), Françoise Wautiez (Workgroup on Solidarity Socio-Economy, France).

Speakers: Alex MacGillivray (New Economics Foundation, RU); Bernardo Reyes, (Instituto de Ecologia Politica, Chile); Valérie Michaud, (AlterUqam, Quebec) ; Ben Quinones, (Asian Pacific Coalition, Philippines/Malaysia) ; Jean-Benoît Bourgeois, (France)

Topic :

In the face of the ever-increasing market-orientation of human activities and as we reach the ecological limits of the planet, alternative indicators of wealth are crucial for the construction of alternative development models. This is not so much a technical challenge of constructing new social and environmental indicators to challenge the mainstream economic indicators, but rather the more difficult challenge of creating a new democratic debate on what are real goals of economic activity and how to redefine wealth.

One of the common characteristics of the many organizations and networks present in Terrain I at the World Social Forum (Porto Alegre) is their wish to democratize the economy, by opening public spaces for debate, be it through campaigns on global economic regulations (a tax on financial markets, debt cancellation, subordination of international commercial rights to human, social and environmental rights etc.) or through economic alternatives and solidarity-based initiatives that work practically and at grassroots level to change the way we produce, consume and save. These twin approaches in different ways both challenge the monopoly of economic expertise currently held by transnational corporation CEOs and finance directors, institutional shareholders, multilateral institution senior economists and ministries of finance. The question of assessment and indicators is a crucial part of the set of tools needed to organize a public debate that allows citizens to challenge a neoliberal vision that reduces all economic behavior to profit-making; all economic growth to Gross National Income and real wealth to dollars per capita.

With a wide range of speakers, this seminar presented alternative measures of wealth at the macro and micro levels, and drawn from all the continents; with specific examples of the contribution of solidarity-based economy activities. The seminar showed clearly how solidarity-based economic activities not only generate economic utility and environmental sustainability but also social utility in terms of social links, the struggle against inequalities and exclusion, and the promotion of economic democracy.

Proposals

To redefine wealth at international, national and local level

Propose a framework of general assessment of the solidarity-based economy and local development that is based on a participative identification of the values shared by communities.

In this context:

- Take into account women's contribution to the creation of wealth and redefine economic concepts such as income, wealth, work, (economic/social) return, etc.

- Adopt the Ecological Footprint in an indicator of sustainable development that shows through a yearly report the ecological debt of the countries of the North towards those of the South;
- Extend the Living Planet Index (of WWF) to measure the impact of the deterioration of the biodiversity on the health of human populations, in particular of the indigenous populations;
- Integrate gender into social indicators, especially poverty indicators;
- Restructure the definition of development aid to encourage international agencies, national governments, territorial communities and NGOs to support solidarity-based economy projects and local enterprise;

To redefine project and programme assessments:

To propose a flexible assessment framework for the solidarity-based economy that takes into account specific local and community definitions of wealth creation.

- Support participatory assessment initiatives coming from the grassroots, that contribute to empower their dynamics rather than external assessments that too often are designed as control in disguise and serve to legitimise the action of the donors or/and NGOs.
- Produce a generic framework of impact indicators for the solidarity-based economy (fair trade, solidarity finance) on local development that can be adapted for local conditions;

The seminar participants agreed that it would be useful to have more consistency in promoting the values and activities in the solidarity economy, propose:

- The creation of progress indicators for the World Social Forum itself that enable participants to evaluate its impact and to demonstrate how the WSF puts its values into practical action, for example in terms of the participation of women, representatives from southern countries and those with limited resources; of the real contributions of social economy enterprises to the organization and logistics of the event; by calculating and minimizing the ecological footprint of the WSF itself; by mapping the formation and development of new networks and campaigns; by understanding the impact on the media and public opinion in different countries; and finally by evaluating the influence of the WSF on political leaders and policy-makers.