

International manifesto for solidarity economy

We, scholars and researchers from various continents (Africa, America, Asia, Europe) who have been working for a long time with practitioners involved in solidarity economy, want to interpellate public authorities in regard to their support to this emerging economy.

Solidarity economy assumes social, ecological, cultural finalities, against the growth of inequalities and for justice, against climate change and for a fair sharing of resources, against uniformisation of behaviours and for the expression of diversities. We need this economy for tomorrow, at that very moment where the depletion of the dominating system is obvious.

Economic science has developed from an epistemological basis which neglects natural resources considering them inexhaustible and favors material interest as a single motivation. While this vision has created material wealth it has also shown its unprecedented destruction capacity. In 1944 the Philadelphia declaration stated that economic development was of value only if it served the needs for social development. It led to the implementation of massive forms of public redistribution and thus the welfare state managed to partially contain perverse effects of the growth dynamic. But the compromise between market and state was destabilized in 1989 by the Washington consensus advocating for a reduction of public intervention and deregulation. Since then the destruction of nature and the rise of inequalities have increased so much that the very definition of economy, inherited from XIXth century, is now challenged. Generating disorders through its perspective of an unlimited growth it ignores ecological and social matters.

Assimilation between economy and unlimited growth has been questioned for a long time even if remaining in minority. Dynamics of popular economy have been examined, mostly in Africa and South America, where they enable a huge part of the population to get by combining informal market activities with reciprocity, mutual help and householding. On the other hand social economy in Europe demonstrated that non capitalistic enterprises (associations, cooperatives, mutuals, ..) exist and last. Popular economy and social economy traditions provide evidence of an enduring resistance against dominating order. They question the monopoly of the principle of self interest

by referring to collective values but have not yet succeeded to initiate a huge transformation. This is why, for several decades throughout the whole world, initiatives have sought to articulate these traditions with a strong will of social change. These solidarity initiatives are despised by most private and public officials who consider them as insignificant. They have been assimilated to second class economy for the poor or social business, in other words to philanthropic attempts to correct the fringes of an unchanged system.

Solidarity economy does not match with this caricature. Often involving women who are the very first to face the damages produced by new capitalism, solidarity economy already exists and imposed itself as a quest for living well. Its importance for the future is thus epistemological. By rejecting the gap between nature and culture, object and subject, which governs economic science of yesterday, solidarity economy adopts on the contrary a relational approach. It rethinks the crossing of knowledges from South and North in the perspective of social and environmental interactions. On each continent solidarity economy suggests plural alternatives.

In Africa, many traditions exist from village grouping, management of the commons (such as forests and water), pooling material resources and mutual help for work in the fields (sossoaga, Djunta-mon) or circular saving systems (tontines). These traditions are nowadays extended by agro-pastoral and craft cooperatives, savings and credit cooperatives, mutual health insurance, mutual funds through banks (such as the Mamda in Morocco), various agroecological experiences in Senegal, Togo, Cabo Verde or Burkina Fasso.

In South America, we can mention among other examples the takeover of companies by their workers, family farming cooperatives and associations, agroecological production and consumption groups, recycling cooperatives, social currencies and solidarity financial services in community banks, revolving credit funds. We can add to this huge variety of original experiences, the solidarity economy incubators created by universities.

In Asia, and mostly in south Asia where the multidimensional problems of poverty and inequities are important, many community and collective approaches are implemented by women and marginalised groups in order to improve both their self production capacity and their empowerment and struggle for recognition. Practices run from alternative education to social finance and complementary currencies ; including short

circuits as producers consumers associations (Teikei in Japan) or other alliances between urban and rural areas.

In Europe, if solidarity economy takes various shapes it has some common features : primacy of people and work over capital, the economic democracy, respect for nature, human emancipation, gender equality and a political horizon of social transformation. Productive sphere, consumption and marketing, savings and solidarity finance, energy supply, care services and other citizen innovations more or less formalised around alternative currencies, food short circuits, collective gardens and mutual help groups are concerned.

Adjustments to the existing system are needed but they will not be sufficient. Experiments initiated through solidarity economy are vectors of new relations between economy and society in both its human and non human dimensions.

The actors involved in solidarity economy must be heard. The economy we need for tomorrow is already here. Its growth depends on the advent of a new generation of public action.

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