

# **The Social and Solidarity Economy: Towards an 'Alternative' Globalisation\***

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# The Social and Solidarity Economy: Towards an “Alternative” Globalisation

## Introduction

The social and solidarity economy are concepts that have become increasingly recognised and used in Quebec since 1995. Following the examples of certain European, as well as Latin American countries, these terms emerged in Quebec as part of a growing will and desire on the part of social movements to propose an alternative model of development, in response to the dominant neo-liberal model. The emergence of this movement has not been without debate, nor obstacles. In fact, the contours and composition of the social economy are still being determined; its definition continues to evolve. However, after the second World Social Forum, which took place in Porto Alegre in February 2002, where the social and solidarity economy were important themes, it is now clear that this movement is firmly inscribed in an international movement for an alternative globalisation.

## Defining the social and solidarity economy

Since the terms “social economy” or “economy of solidarity” are not yet widely used in Canada, outside of Quebec, it is important to establish certain defining elements. The social economy combines two terms that are often contradictory:

- *“economy” refers to the concrete production of goods or of services by business or enterprise that contributes to a net increase in collective wealth.*
- *“social” refers to social profitability, as opposed to purely economic profit. Social profitability is evaluated in terms of contribution to democratic development, of encouragement of an active and empowered citizenship and of projects which promote both individual and collective initiative. Social profitability contributes to the improvement of the quality of life, and of the well-being of the population, particularly through the increase of available services. Like the public sector, as well as the traditional private sector, social profitability can also be evaluated in terms of job creation.*

The social economy consists of an ensemble of activities and organisations, emerging from collective enterprises, that pursue common principles and shared structural elements:

- *the objective of the social economy enterprise is to serve its members or the community, instead of simply striving for financial profit;*
- *the social economy enterprise is autonomous of the State;*
- *in its statute and code of conduct, it establishes a democratic decision-making process that implies the necessary participation of users and workers;*

- *it prioritises people and work over capital in the distribution of revenue and surplus;*
- *its activities are based on principles of participation, empowerment, and individual and collective responsibility.*

Based on these principles, we can see that the social economy is not a new concept, neither in Quebec, in Canada, nor in the rest of the world. Indeed, the social economy has been a part of the socio-economic landscape in Quebec for over a hundred years. Since the nineteenth century, collective organisations and enterprise, in different forms and under different designations, have contributed to the development of a more human economy and society. In fact, the nineteenth century saw the historical emergence of the workers' movement, in tandem with the birth of the cooperative and mutualist movement. These two movements assumed different trajectories, coming together in certain countries and during certain periods in time, and moving apart at other times and places. Similar to the workers' movement, the social economy has taken many forms throughout its history, and adopted different political and ideological colours over its 150 years of existence.

Today, the social economy in Quebec refers to an ensemble of cooperatives, mutual benefit societies and associations, ranging from the Desjardins credit union movement, to other, diverse community organisations. The social economy refers to all initiatives that are not a part of the public economy, nor the traditional private sector. In essence, it is characterized by enterprises and organisations which are autonomous and private in nature, but where capital and the means of production are collective.

Large and inclusive, the definition of the social economy which prevails in Quebec today has been, for the most part, constructed around the so-called "new" social economy that emerged approximately thirty years ago, in the fields of community economic development, worker and consumer cooperatives, and community organisations. This new social economy differs from the former or "old" social economy, consisting of financial cooperatives, mutual benefit societies and large producer cooperatives, especially in agriculture. There are many types of organisations and collective businesses involved in the new social economy, all of which are rooted in collective entrepreneurship and independent community action: for example, vacation camps for families, daycare centres, community media, cooperative housing, women's centres, community economic development structures, etc. A portrait of the social economy in Quebec reflects its importance in the social and economic development of the province. Even without considering the Desjardins movement, nor the two largest agricultural cooperatives, the social economy accounts for over 10 000 collective enterprises and community organisations, which employ over 100 000 workers.

## **The dual reality of the social economy: At the heart of action, and at the heart of a debate on a new model of development**

The social economy, which is promoted by the *Chantier de l'économie sociale*, is part of a double-sided social movement. It is a movement of social transformation, aiming for the democratisation and development of an economy of solidarity; a movement which is able to evolve without confusing political goals with ideas concerning economic development. At the same time, the social economy is a movement of strategy and of action, aimed and deployed into the heart of a mixed economy that combines the activities of the market, the State and civil society. Thus, this dual reality does not manifest itself only in the context of ideological or political debate; on all levels, theoretical and practical, the social and solidarity economy explicitly confronts the assumptions and assertions of a neo-liberal vision of the economy. When we refer to social or collective entrepreneurship, when we refer to social output and productivity, and the financial viability of a collective enterprise, when we insist that regional development prioritise endogenous development instead of a search for outside investors, we are making significant statements. First and foremost, that we aim to support local, collective enterprise, while at the same time attacking certain “inherent truths” and “inevitable realities” of the neo-liberal economy.

It is difficult to separate the practical field of the social and solidarity economy movement from its contribution to the more theoretical debate on a new vision of globalisation. This is because the social and solidarity economy contributes as much to social innovation, as it contributes to the re-embedding of the notion of solidarity in economic activities, as it also contributes to a debate on new models of development.

## **Reintroducing the notion of solidarity in economic activity, through local development**

Social economy initiatives generally emerge from the desire to promote a form of local development which privileges solidarity as an integral part of economic activity. The results of this approach have been impressive. For the last six years, over one thousand social economy enterprises have been developed in Quebec. They have created over 20 000 new and permanent jobs, many of which have been filled by people who were otherwise excluded from the job market. This is without mentioning the tens of thousands of jobs, which have been integrated into the social economy through daycare centres, information technology, community media, social tourism, leisure activities, proximity services, etc. Furthermore, the benefits associated with the social economy can also be evaluated in other ways.

At the heart of the social economy is the empowerment of citizens, through the development of their milieu; through enterprises that have not been imposed “from above”. Everywhere, it is citizens, local organisations, and technical support groups which have decided to act on the opportunity to establish a daycare centre, a *ressourcerie* (a recycling business), a homecare business, a multi-cultural festival, a prenatal resource centre, etc. In so doing, these communities affirm their will and their capacity to be effective entrepreneurs, based on an alternative model of development, itself based on solidarity. These people are not motivated by a desire for personal profit nor an accumulation of personal wealth, as we are used to seeing, but rather by the desire to increase the community’s wealth, by proposing original and relevant collective solutions to community needs.

### **A potpourri of social innovation**

Another important aspect of the social economy has been its contribution to social innovation. While technological innovation generally takes place within a research laboratory, social innovation usually happens on the ground, led by practitioners, rather than scientific “experts”. By trial and error, learning by doing, and exchanging ideas within groups where a democratic representation of opinion is assured and obliged, new ways of functioning and innovative responses to problems and needs are imagined and initiated. In fact, the capacity for innovation within the social economy is increasingly renowned, even at an international level. All over the world, people are noticing the use of micro-credit, in order to assist families in the South who do not have access to traditional systems of credit, or the existence of collective kitchens in Latin America and *tontines* in Africa, or local exchange systems which boast the participation of over two and a half million people in Argentina; they are also observing the presence of proximity or community-based services in France, social cooperatives in Italy, and the new solidarity-based European “stock market”. All of these initiatives are proof of the importance of the social and solidarity economy, in the search for new models of development.

In Quebec, as elsewhere, community organisations, local development groups and social economy enterprise all have a heightened awareness of needs (and new markets), principally because of their solid roots in the community, but also because of their proximity to social movements (for example, the environmental movement). In a larger perspective, social and solidarity economy businesses are able to be innovative due to their preoccupation with sustainable development. Moreover, local governance institutions provide an important forum for consultation and discussion, in order to determine a model of economic development which corresponds with the quality of life of the community or communities concerned.

The social economy has also furthered the modernization of collective services, serving as a laboratory of research and development. In the social sphere, the social economy serves at least two purposes: First, to find solutions to urgent problems linked to poverty, be it hunger (food banks, soup kitchens, collective kitchens), social or community housing, violence (shelters, support groups, etc.), or social exclusion (reintegration

enterprises, employment-related training, literacy groups, etc.) Secondly, to find solutions to new social demands, as has been the case with many local initiatives that served as models for the establishment of institutional, parapublic or community-based networks (for example, community health clinics that became *CLSCs*, or daycare centres that became *Centres de petite enfance*, which are, respectively, publicly-funded healthcare and daycare institutions). The same phenomenon has also taken place in two other areas: in local development, where institutions such as the Local Economic Development Corporations (LEDC)s and the Community Futures Development Corporations (CFDC)s, have inspired the creation of a provincial-wide network of local development centres, and in the field of the environment, where the establishment of a network of recycling businesses, or *ressourceries*, was inspired by local-level initiatives of the environmental movement.

### **Towards a new relationship between economic development and social development: the role of collective action**

Indeed, it is important to remember that the social economy is not limited to finding immediate, short-term responses to problems. The social and solidarity economy movement is also firmly embedded within a vision of a pluralist economy, which challenges traditional economic development on a larger scale.

Throughout the years, macro-economic strategies have been developed, but always parallel to, as opposed to combined with social development strategy. In the past, the State has positioned itself as the main actor in both spheres, social and economic, but with two entirely separate frameworks. This has resulted in a series of isolated measures and programmes, focused on the same communities and population. Too often, this strategy has proven inefficient, as it implies solutions which are mechanical and unrelated, applied to different aspects of the same reality without any holistic vision. There is often the sense that economic growth will, itself, inevitably solve everything, and that the State can subsequently resolve the social problems of a community, by allowing it a greater share of the fiscal pie. However, the last twenty years have conclusively demonstrated that this strategy has been, without any doubt, ineffective.

Clearly, there is a need for growth, but not at any price. Obviously, it is important to have a system of social protection, but it is essential to resolve problems at their roots, and not to have a system which simply compensates its victims. To do so, there is a need to act in a way which integrates both economic and social elements. There is also the need to be able to depend on the State; certainly, a transformed State, but one which has been strengthened, able to govern and act as a partner with civil society initiatives. Finally, we must develop an economy “with a market”, rather than perpetuate a “market economy”.

The development of the social and solidarity economy is firmly enshrined within this philosophy, and promotes the advantages of a pluralist economy. Instead of encouraging an economic approach where all must either be private or public, we must value and acknowledge the importance of a social economy, run by civil society, that defends the

collective interest. The market and the state, these two polarized forces, cannot be the only elements that control economic and social development. A pluralist economy is inclusive of civil society, as it depends on its participation in building a model of social and economic development, where the economy works towards the social benefit of the local, and the greater community.

In the context of the modernization and transformation of the role of the State, the participation of civil society in the social economy encourages and extends the idea of a collective body being responsible for essential elements of development, and for the protection of collective well-being and interest.

It is important to note that the social economy proposes a definition of collective interest which does not confine it to public sector activities. Furthermore, its approach provides an alternative to private enterprise. Thus, sectors of activity can be developed without being subject to their “commodification”; and while the State may assume responsibility for regulation and redistribution, there is no State involvement in the actual dispensation of services. As such, the social economy and the public sector are not forced to compete with each other. Firmly structured, they are complementary to each other, providing the mutual support which, ultimately, leads to a genuine and effective realisation of collective interest.

In certain fields, where the response to social need is more lucrative, the social economy is progressively establishing a market presence. There are numerous examples of this reality in Quebec: First, the experience of forestry cooperatives, which have made a commitment to local development that far exceeds the contribution of multinationals. There is also the example of recycling businesses (*les ressourceries*), where the need for waste management has proven that financial and ecological profitability can co-exist. Finally, funeral cooperatives offer an alternative to the standardised American model for this ritual. In summary, without pretending that social economy enterprise can or will fundamentally transform all aspects of traditional, private enterprise, it is important to recognise that the social economy, when it occupies a significant market space, can influence models of development. In fact, it is not surprising that the presence of collective enterprise in certain sectors or areas of the world, actually pushes traditional private enterprises to remake their image (and, in certain cases, their ways of operating as well), to resemble social enterprise.

Finally, the most strategic element of the social economy is perhaps its response to a fundamental need: the ability to respond to collective need by securing collective ownership of our resources, in a context of market globalisation.

### **The social and solidarity economy: An integral part of the movement for an alternative globalisation**

The presence and participation of social economy actors from Quebec in anti-globalisation movements is not new. Extremely active in this area, the *Chantier de*

*l'économie sociale* was involved in the organisation of a very popular workshop on this issue for the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre. This international experience was not a first. On the contrary, often in collaboration with other Québécois partners, such as unions, researchers and international development and cooperation organisations, the *Chantier de l'économie sociale* has been active in numerous international exchanges and networks. We have participated in many European events, as well as at the People's Summit in Quebec City, etc., and are constantly weaving new bilateral links with numerous organisations and countries.

Despite its relatively recent visibility, the social and solidarity economy is often an important item on the agenda at these encounters. This is not surprising, because the social network within which the social economy exists was created by larger, national social movements. The beginnings of the *Chantier de l'économie sociale* is a prime example of this reality.

The *Chantier de l'économie sociale* emerged in a particular context. In 1996, the Quebec government organized a Summit on the Economy and Employment, where participants included civil society representatives: along with leaders from big business, employers' associations and the unions and institutional networks, representatives of important social and community movements participated in this summit. Faced with a 12% unemployment rate and a significant deficit, the government challenged Quebec civil society to come up with strategies that would allow for economic renewal and job creation, while taking into consideration the limitations of State intervention. To do so, it proposed the creation of a working-group on employment issues, led by actors from civil society. The *Chantier de l'économie sociale* was created from this large group. It had six months to fulfil its mandate: to prepare a plan of action able to mobilize the social economy network, and to propose job creation strategies that would be acceptable to the participants of this summit and which, of course, complied with the guidelines set by the government.

For many reasons, this proved to be an immense challenge. First, in Quebec as in the rest of the world, the idea of an economy based on communitarian values was and is far from the dominant view. Secondly, despite its important presence in Quebec, the term "social economy" had never been widely used; thus, it was complicated to identify and recognize. Thirdly, because this process took place within limits "imposed" by the State, many social economy participants, extremely attached to their autonomy, regarded the entire process with great suspicion.

Despite these obstacles, this challenge was successfully met by the Quebec actors and participants of the social economy. Obviously, a great deal of effort was spent to convince the diverse networks within the social economy – the network of cooperatives, community groups, local development organisations, private-sector businesses involved in local development, and sector-based organisations – of the necessity to work together despite so much diversity, with a common goal: to achieve visible gains that corresponded with shared objectives, but particularly to demonstrate the potential of collective enterprise or organisations. This involved establishing a clear definition of the



social economy, making its past achievements more visible, and proposing a series of sector-by-sector strategies that would allow for the emergence of new economic activity, able to respond to social, economic, and environmental need. It was also necessary to identify the conditions under which the social economy could emerge and flourish. The conditions established ranged from a formal recognition of the role of the social economy within the socio-economic landscape in Quebec, to the integration of local and regional development policies that would ensure support for collective enterprise, to equal access to the development incentives offered to traditional enterprise, to changes in legislation on cooperatives, which would allow for the creation of solidarity cooperatives, to the establishment of new training and funding tools.

This plan of action, submitted during the Summit on the Economy and Employment in October 1996, received the support of its participants. During the last six years, not only have the majority of the elements discussed in this plan been accomplished, thanks to local actors involved in many sectors of activity, but new projects and initiatives have also been developed and implemented. It is essential to point out that, for the duration of this challenge, the participants of the *Chantier de l'économie sociale* could count on an environment which valued consultation and representation, as well as on the collaboration of the Quebec government (however imperfect, at times), which did make commitments during the Summit of 1996.

The success of this large partnership, which was the *Chantier* of 1996, motivated its members to transform it from a temporary structure (in existence for the duration of the Summit, with two and a half year of follow-up), to a permanent one. Thus, in April 1999, the *Chantier de l'économie sociale* held its first general assembly, and elected a board of directors. In order to represent the diverse realities of the social economy (particularly, the emerging projects and those already in place), the 28 members of this board are elected by different electoral colleges. As such, the board of directors of the *Chantier de l'économie sociale* includes representatives of cooperative and non-profit enterprise, of social economy development groups – in particular local and regional development networks, as well as support networks for collective enterprise – and representatives of the large social movements which share the values and vision of the social economy. The social movements involved are the community movement, the women's movement, the labour movement, the environmental movement, the cooperative movement, and the cultural, leisure, and local development movements.

The *Chantier* has the following mission: to promote the social economy, to support the consolidation, experimentation and elaboration of new projects and fields, to encourage consultation between the diverse participants of the social economy, and to ensure that these actors be represented within the public domain. For the most part, the *Chantier* depends on existing networks and resources. With limited resources, it attempts to build new networks and partnerships that are based on common ideas and strategies. For example, the *Chantier* was behind the creation of a new financial instrument, called the Réseau d'investissement social du Québec (RISQ). This institution, which has ten million dollars available for social economy initiatives, is the result of contributions from the private sector, and as well as from the government of Quebec. The RISQ is jointly

administered by its financial backers as well as by social economy actors. The *Chantier* also co-directs an inter-university research partnership, called the *Alliance de recherche universités-communautés en économie sociale*. As well, the *Chantier* founded the *Comité sectoriel de main-d'oeuvre de l'économie sociale et de l'action communautaire* which, in partnership with public employment institutions and the actors in the social economy, works hard to improve work and management-oriented skills in diverse sectors of activity.

As such, it is clear that action is an essential part of the social economy movement in Quebec, without ignoring the essential debates involved in the construction of a movement for an alternative globalisation.

### **The social economy and the economy of solidarity: A planet-wide project**

Around the world, the social economy movement is becoming more and more dynamic, and increasingly recognized. In Europe, the presence of the social economy is significant, particularly in France, Belgium, Spain and Sweden. This network has created strong links with movements such as ATTAC. Social economy networks are also emerging in East European countries, part of the reconstruction of civil society. At the initiative of the European Union, a new conference on the social economy (the fifth in two years) will take place in Prague, in October 2002. The development of the social and solidarity economy has now become an important issue in the construction of the European Union.

In Latin America, the social and solidarity economy has taken diverse forms. For example, in Brazil, the Centrale Unie des Travailleurs (CUT) has put into place an *Agence de Développement Solidaire*, which participates directly in the creation of worker cooperatives, and of financial cooperatives for marginalized populations of Brazil. During the World Social Forum, the *Chantier de l'économie sociale* and the Centrale des syndicats nationaux (CSN) established a formal collaboration with the CUT and the *Agence de Développement Solidaire*.

In Africa, where in certain countries up to 80% of economic activity is derived from the informal economy, and where the State is often not in a position to defend collective interest in development issues, the social and solidarity economy seems more and more to be the only progressive development strategy.

In this context, the *Chantier de l'économie sociale* is actively working towards building a global network of initiatives within the social economy. In October 2001, the *Chantier* was an active partner in the organisation of the "Second Meeting on the Globalisation of Solidarity: The social and solidarity economy, a North-South perspective", which took place in Quebec. This event followed the first meeting, which took place in 1997, in Lima, Peru. The objectives of this process are clearly explained in the following excerpt from the pre-conference document, which was produced for the Quebec meetings:

*Without any doubt, initiatives that reintroduce the idea of solidarity in economic activity do already exist. However, these initiatives remain modest, in a market economy where a neo-liberal perspective is dominant. The challenge is to create the foundation for an economic system which values solidarity, by multiplying the areas, spaces and scale of intervention – local and regional, and at a federal, national and international level – to go beyond the micro economic level, which characterises the existing social economy initiatives.*

*The success of the economy of solidarity depends on the concerted push that it receives from social movements (community action, women's groups, labour, youth) as well as from social economy enterprise; afterwards, its success also depends on the place it is allocated within a greater social project. Success also depends on our capacity to evolve, internationally. We have already begun this process, but in a way that remains scattered. To continue in Quebec, what was started in Lima, we must:*

- *take advantage of our strategic position to encourage a convergence of the different components of the economy of solidarity, from here as from elsewhere, in a way which strengthens this model, at an economic, political and practical level; as a model of socio-economic development, and as a socio-political issue;*
- *firmly put into practice solidarity between communities in the North and the South*
- *overcome the challenge of coordinating on an international level, without solidarity losing its global impact.*

The event in Quebec was significant, in terms of building a global network for the social and solidarity economy. More than 300 people from 37 countries participated. During these meetings, a decision was made to create an international liaison commission. This commission will be comprised of six representatives per continent, whose mandate will be:

- To assure the circulation of debate, of expertise, of know-how concerning social economy enterprise;
- To assure a connection between this expertise and the networks that they cover;
- To assure that social economy enterprise and networks are incorporated into greater networks;
- To assure an inventory and follow-up of networks, and support to national networks
- To assure a contribution to the ideological struggle for a social and solidarity economy, in particular by being present and representing the social economy during international forums;
- And, in the spirit of the encounters in Lima and in Quebec, to assure the preparation of a Third International Meeting on the Globalisation of Solidarity, which will take place in Dakar, in 2005.

## **Assessment and perspectives for the future**

While the movement for a social and solidarity economy is, in its new form, still quite recent, the actors of this movement are extremely optimistic and determined for the future. The reasons are simple. The last decades, characterised by the triumph of neo-liberalism, have left a series of events in their wake: the Enron scandal, the crises in Argentina, statistics which clearly show a growing disparity between rich and poor countries, as well as between the rich and the poor within the same country, etc. At the same time, the initiatives that have been put into place by the actors of the social and solidarity economy are more numerous than ever, and are more and more visible. Thanks to information and communications technology, as well as international meetings such as Porto Alegre, international networks are being built and strengthened, due to the capacity of actors within their own country.

In summary, what kind of an assessment can be made of the contribution of this movement to the development of citizenship, to the renewal of democracy and to the construction of an alternative globalisation?

An evaluation must be made at different levels, as the initiatives of the social and solidarity economy play many roles in the movement for an alternative globalisation. In a very concrete way, they have allowed women and men, as well as entire communities, to develop and respond to their own needs, while integrating the values of solidarity and social justice, as they see them, into their actions. The services which are created, the new jobs, the new organisational structures and the networks established already offer solutions to basic needs, expressed by individuals, groups, and communities. In light of the dominance of neo-liberalism, each and all of these represent great achievements.

However, the achievements of the social economy go beyond an immediate response to needs. They allow the participants of this movement to create a different kind of economy, and to do so as a community. They also help destroy the fatalism that neo-liberalism perpetuates in its claim to be the only model of development. The way in which the social and solidarity economy work, allows for actions which confront, head-on, strategies based solely on the financial aspects of the economy, while allowing individuals and movements to be confident about their ability as collective entrepreneurs. As such, the gains of the social economy inspire groups and movements to conceptualise larger and more complete strategies that aim to develop a world economy, that is both global, and is based upon solidarity.

It is in this way that the social and solidarity economy has added an essential element to the political movement for an alternative globalisation. For this goal cannot remain solely a political idea. It must be based on a vision which is political, social, economic and cultural; it must respect diverse realities while, at the same time, sharing a common foundation, which, in our case, is solidarity. Just as civil society demands political recognition, and the right to participate in discussions concerning commercial trade and trade agreements, the actors of the social economy have begun to demand increasing

economic recognition, meaning a more significant space in the economic sphere, on a local, national and, soon, international level.

Within this movement, people are conscious of the obvious challenges that await them. Even in the countries which are considered the most “progressive”, the possibility of building a pluralist economy, based on social justice and sustainable development, is still considered by the majority to be an impossible dream, a project which is dated and out of fashion.

Thus, there are enormous challenges ahead, but, already, certain future paths have been identified:

The first path is to assure the recognition of the existence of social and solidarity economy initiatives. Because the strength of this movement, which consists of a multitude of diverse, locally-based initiatives is also its weakness, due to the minute recognition that these projects actually receive. For example, the network of *Centres de petites enfance*s, with their 22 000 employees, represents one of the largest non-governmental employers in Quebec. And yet, who recognizes them as such? The social and solidarity economy is not made up of multinationals, whose presence dominates the media, sharing this space with large, political lobbies. These enterprises are not quoted on the stock market, and are therefore absent from the business pages of newspapers. Nor do these enterprises promise huge output for profit-obsessed shareholders, who seek a maximization of personal gain. The social economy’s struggle for recognition must take a different path; through its visibility within communities, through the construction of national and international networks, which could let communities know about actions and options, and through an open and large debate on the importance of the social and solidarity economy, within a pluralist economy.

The second area to pursue is the need to respond to the challenges of development, in a way that is more effective and better structured, allowing this movement to strengthen the capacity of communities to adopt an economic vision which privileges solidarity. As with all economic development, the actors of the social and solidarity economy need access to capital, training, markets, and tools of research and development. The strategies to reach these objectives are diverse, and differ from country to country. It is also understood that, during the next few years, it will be necessary to accelerate our speed. The social and solidarity economy cannot accept to remain marginal, with exclusively small-scale initiatives that are not necessarily connected to one another. It is essential that these movements not be afraid to expand their aims, to use greater means, and to have access to more capital, all the while remaining in solidarity. Neither should the social and solidarity economy accept an economic space which is not wanted by others; this movement will learn to confront the private sector on its own terrain, and to convince governments and populations that it is the best choice.

Gaining recognition and access to developmental tools will not happen easily. To succeed, it is increasingly understood that national networks must be strengthened, and more particularly, that new, international networks must be created. These networks

should not be limited to the actors within the social and solidarity economy. One of the most urgent challenges is to establish a better understanding of the importance of the social and solidarity economy, among the many and diverse movements for an alternative globalisation. The social and solidarity economy must rely more on the social movements which have adopted the values of solidarity and equity in their struggles. To do so, it is necessary to clearly identify how actions can be complementary to each other, and how strategies can be more complicit with each other. In this sense, the presence of the social and solidarity economy at the World Social Forum represents an important step towards this goal.

Of course, there still remains an enormous amount of work, in order to further our reflection on fundamental issues, such as the role of the nation-state, the market, the North-South relationship, the relationship between men and women, and the respect for diversity. More and more, these questions are on the agendas of meetings, conferences, research and debate. This is a sign of a healthy and blossoming movement, in full expansion.

