

GLOBALISATION AND THE THIRD SECTOR: A NORTH-SOUTH PERSPECTIVE

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Three main ideas are outlined in this presentation: the current revival of the third sector, its close connection with social movements and non-governmental organisations in the North and South, and its linkage with a new societal and developmental model. The common thread running through these ideas is that NGOs are at the centre of the relationship between local communities, the third sector and development.

The dynamics of the third sector in the North and community movements in the South are becoming increasingly similar. The community movement represents an unprecedented opportunity for social innovation in the midst of the present crisis. We will first outline the dominant trends within the current transformation in societies of both the North and the South; then we will examine a number of these new trends within various social movements and NGOs. Lastly, we will highlight several new directions for international cooperation, in the context of the third sector and solidarity economics.

1. NORTH AND SOUTH SOCIETIES: AN OVERVIEW OF COMMON CHALLENGES

Both in the North and in the South, society is undergoing radical transformation. Several analytical studies concur in stating that we are at a major historical turning point, that we have reached a crisis in our search for a new societal and developmental model and that the time for action has almost run out. We can no longer talk about a continuous development process for the countries of the South nor about a favourable juncture for an international «Pro-third-world» solidarity movement. As for the North, gone are the days where we could talk about societies where the Welfare State would guarantee a better future for everyone and full employment for all. In other words, the future has become, once again,

uncertain. In the North, democracies are being tested by higher unemployment and precarious living conditions. In most countries in the South, economic and social destabilisation seems to have gained the upper hand over development. One main question remains: what model do we have for society and development as we enter the 21st century? What is the role that the third sector can play in the North as well as in the South?

Globalisation as we know it today is fraught with ambiguities; at most, it could eventually bring about a broadening of cooperative endeavours between nations, but for now it seems more bent on reinforcing inequalities and threatening democracies. The social question is re-emerging and is increasingly becoming a core issue in the North. Meanwhile, in the South, marginalisation is the main factor in the isolation of several countries. Thus we are witnessing a profound realignment, I would even say the emergence of a new North and a new

South, made up of vast slum areas, running from New York or Paris to Mexico, Sao Paulo, Bombay or Jakarta.

Our current situation is influenced by three main trends: Globalisation and its corollary: the monetarisation of the economy; the spread of precarious living conditions and marginalisation on a global scale; the changing role of the state including its weaker position in the global balance of power equation.

1.1 Globalisation and its corollary: the monetarisation of the economy:

The internationalisation of markets is not a new phenomenon. What is new is its scale and portent. Today, internationalisation goes hand in hand with the rearranging of large regions into tight economic blocs (Europe, the Americas, South-East Asia). It is driven financial globalisation, stemming from the abolition of the systems which used to regulate the cross-border currency flow. The deregulation and liberalisation of trade, the communication opportunities made possible by rapidly evolving technology are all factors that reinforce the internationalisation of markets. The results are ambiguous: on the one

hand, businesses are focussing their efforts much more on external markets, at the expense of domestic ones. Their outward focus is growing constantly. They are continually readjusting themselves by entrusting the work to sub-contractors, by intensifying their rate of technological changes, by trimming their workforce and retaining better-qualified personnel etc*

In this new social and economic landscape, the employment crisis, and loss of social cohesion has moved to the top of the list of national and international social concerns, reflecting the widening of the gap between unqualified and qualified workforce in the North, and increased competition between the nations of the South. This has resulted in the proliferation of these groups, which have gone underground into an informal economy, the only cushion left to absorb this social tremor.

1.2 The spread of precarious living conditions and marginalisation on a global scale

1.2.1 Marginalisation in the North

Until the 1980s, in the societies of the North, it was assumed that development was a permanent fixture of social progress. Today, those same societies are revisited by social conditions that afflict the developing world. This explains why the social and economic sciences prefer to use the terms marginalisation, disqualification, exclusion, and of social breakdown instead of the term poverty. In short, after «the post-war boom years» we are now witnessing, in the countries of the North, a steady rise in the marginalisation of people with a corresponding collapse of social stability. The disappearance of full-time work, and the disintegration of northern societies industrial base, have contributed to the suppression of their working classes, the loss of their social status and a weakening of union power. At the same time the collective handling of public services is being phased out to sub-contractors (to community organisations, for example).

In conclusion: Work is still the core activity for the major part of the population, but for the rest, a non-working life (unemployment, infrequent bouts of employment) is becoming their main life-experience. The third sector and local development are emerging at the intersection of those two trends and give us

some reason for hope. Why? Because they can play a key-role in creating employment and in starting or reviving businesses; Because they can encourage the local control of land development; Because they can foster empowerment of local communities and encourage them to mobilise their members.

The third sector and Solidarity Economics

The term "third sector" refers to a particular form of activity combining a community organisation and a business working together according to a certain number of rules covering democratic procedure, activities, membership and profit-sharing. In this way third sector enterprises offset capital's overriding influence, while maintaining at the same time a certain adaptive approach to the market. They focus on certain needed functions which are not being fulfilled by either profit-motivated organisations or the State. From a legal standpoint, third sector organisations may be cooperatives, credit unions, or non-profit organisations. In sum, they have the following distinctive

characteristics:

- a) Their outcomes which are not capitalistic (the best possible bottom line) but "social", in the sense that they aim to provide both economic viability and social utility (by serving struggling individuals or groups).*
 - b) Their representatives who either originate from, or have close links to, population groups having trouble finding work or meeting their basic needs*
 - c) Their democratic structures and rules*
 - d) Their activities dominated by «collective or social enterprise» logic*
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1.2.2 Marginalisation in the South

In the North, as in the South, marginalisation is the consequence of a common economic and social rationale. It stems from a state of acute instability which itself is closely related to the increased splitting of society into two separate camps and to the globalisation of certain social problems (ecological crises,

mass migration, working children, the threat of social implosion in those countries that are «losing» the battle for survival, etc.).

In the 80s and 90s, these gaps between North and South have widened considerably, as the South transferred more money to the North (in total reimbursements of capital and interests) than they received in new capital. Even worse, for those countries that are at the bottom-end of international trading (about fifty in all, two-thirds being African countries), the influence of undeveloped countries is constantly being eroded. To such an extent that soon, for many of them neo-colonial domination will no longer be an issue since marginalisation has fully replaced it.

The economic crisis has also had another consequence: Developing countries (in all about fifty), under pressure from the IMF- who imposed on them such drastic economic measures as to mortgage for years ahead the future of their working peoples have cancelled their already meagre social programs. The composition of the working population has been profoundly transformed by this process. The informal economy and the independent worker have thus become the new economic and social protagonists (outnumbering the farmer and the metalworker).

1.2.2 The diminishing role of the state and its disempowerment by the forces of globalisation.

With the onset of globalisation, the states of the North have seen their role challenged, as economic and financial networks have become more autonomous and considerably more powerful. Used to being the leading force in the management of human affairs on the international scene, the authority of the state is now being eroded not only from the top by its elite in the economic and cultural fields, but albeit in a lesser measure, from the base, notably by local governments (and a few small and medium-size enterprises) who make cooperative agreements. independently

In the South, developing country governments who in the 60s and 70s were invested with every power and who carried every hope, have been disempowered by the structural adjustment policies imposed

upon them by IMF and the World Bank. Development is further hindered or nullified impotent by the «landlord states». Within such system, whole populations will have to invest their future in the informal sector.

1.3 Is there no alternative to the present globalisation system?

Is there no alternative to the present globalisation system, a system promoted by the IMF and the World Bank, who see market-forces as the only viable solution to development? There are, in our view, many trends and movements that run counter to this view point:

- 1) the rise of a global socially-responsible society and the proliferation of NGOs;
- 2) The emergence of grassroot enterprises;
- 3) New political trends (which value work-sharing, the development of a solidarity economics, new forms of international cooperation etc.);
- 4) democratic reforms advanced by some social movements (control by local populations of their own territories, mobilisation of individuals and groups for the protection of the environment, etc);
- 5) The exploring of new socio-economic alternatives and the pioneering of new strategies within the dynamics of the third sector and of local development. Albeit timidly, a new world-embracing social contract is being developed. It gives local government an important role to play, while resurrecting the concept of collective welfare and the need to control economic and financial activity.

2. SOCIAL CLASSES, SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND THE THIRD SECTOR IN THE COUNTRIES OF THE NORTH AND OF THE SOUTH

2.1 Social classes, social movements and the third sector in the North

Every social movement has felt the brunt of the present crisis. From a short-term perspective, the situation seems more worrisome than encouraging. A look at history can, however, offer us another angle. In the North, after the period of capitalist exploitation that was the hallmark of society from the 19th century to the end of the 30s, we moved into a period characterised by the conflict-ridden

integration of workers and the marginalized poor; a society which earned for, its thirty years duration (1945-1975), the title of «Post war Boom years». During these «three glorious decades», the 30s crisis was replaced by the rise of the Mighty Welfare State, and social laws and agreements negotiated under the auspices of a «New Deal». From the 80s onwards, social integration has been halted by the emergence of a new kind of social exclusion, which brought in its wake a dualist society. This new crisis has led to the birth or rebirth of the third sector .

Since the 80s, social mobilisation has become more diffuse and has been brought about by a wide variety of movements (unions, women's groups, environmental groups, popular and community organisations, youth groups). Given this new reality, we will present, as our central hypothesis, that social movements, with the community movement leading the way, are generating innovative solutions, because they occupy a unique, midway, position, in the space created by the relationship between the state and civil society, between local communities and development and between the «economic» and «social» arenas. We might add that this new dynamics is part of a new social contract within which the community movement is given a new role, and occupies a place midway between the «local» and the «global». Step by step, notions such as Partnership, conflict management through cooperation, economic and social revitalisation, local development, solidarity economics and emerging non-profit sector, are coming in by the side door.

2.2 Social movements and the third sector in the South

In the South also, because of the pervasiveness of the ongoing exclusion process, social movements are going through an extreme period of change. The 70s had witnessed the emergence of a strong urban movement, which regrouped community, urban and rural workers, often around a common socialist initiative. The recession of the 80s provoked a fragmentation of these movements, while the 90s introduced new players on the social scene, notably women and youth, who worked within local communities and developed concrete strategies for survival and development.

It is this from the matrix of the 80s and 90s that a new type social economy was able to emerge, in the wake of social struggles for democracy. It is those struggles, which have accelerated the retreat and exhaustion of several authoritarian regimes and military dictatorships. Indeed it is true to say that although the 70s served to highlight North-South inequality, it is the 80s and 90s which are playing a part in renewing democracy and in throwing off the economic straightjacket of present-day globalisation. This is being made possible through the emergence of non-competitive regions and of new multi-nations contracts (the Lisbon group, 1995). In this context, social movements and in particular the shantytown populist movement, seem to gain in strength and to be ready to take the lead, supported by NGOs and church groups, who have been cast, somewhat unwillingly, with the role of opposition forces.

In many countries of the South, shantytown movements seem to have taken the lead, on both the political and social front. It is from them that concepts such as popular economy, solidarity economics have emerged, following those of informal sector or subsistence economy. To illustrate the point, let's take the example of Villa El Salvador, a shantytown with some 300 000 inhabitants, situated on the outskirts of Lima, Peru. Today, Villa El Salvador is autonomous and manages its own territory. It has divided its residential blocks into organised neighbourhoods, and established public services around its 120 public squares and co-ordinated a network of small businesses all in the spirit of solidarity economics.

3. THE THIRD SECTOR AND THE NEW SOCIETAL AND DEVELOPMENT MODEL~: A PROPOSED EVALUATION

3.1 The renewal of the third sector in the North

For the last two decades, in most of the countries of the North, new third sector initiatives, very different from those of the past, are being implemented involving new players, new answers to new social needs, new organisations systems. Let's see how they are different.

Development projects

The promoters of these new third sector business projects foster the revival of communities by creating a localised series of structuring impacts which help communities to take control of the development of their territories. Even if the third sector is not really an «alternative» global model, it can contribute to the democratisation of economy and of society.

Institutions

Support from the community and from governments can encourage the emergence of local mechanisms for social integration and development, in the context of negotiated partnerships. These initiatives, however, are confronted by two seemingly contradictory systems, on one hand the management of public programs aimed at specific targets (through subcontracting etc.), and on the other, the motivation of the community (empowerment and local responsibility and control approach).

Organisations

Through their management methods, the third sector enterprises seek to reconcile both the need to make a profit and to meet the social needs of their stakeholders, in other words economic viability and social mandate. They do not always succeed, because of commercial pressures and the weak support they receive from the state. They are able to succeed, however, when the pressures of social movement add weight to their endeavours.

In brief, from a global perspective, these initiatives can become levers for social transformation, providing that they act simultaneously on several levels: 1) Defending threatened groups by suggesting «alternatives» (creation of workers cooperatives, community enterprises etc.) 2) imposing new local methods of social regulation to counter the impacts of crises; 3) Experimenting with other methods for business and policy development.

3.2 The emergence of the third sector in the South

When the third sector in the South is mentioned, the first thing that comes to mind is the physical improvement of shantytowns, the development of solidarity economics, primarily through the informal sector (micro-credit, micro-enterprises etc*) and through sustainable development (urban wastes recycling*). It is important to point something out, however: Although the informal sector can be used as a starting point for developing solidarity economics, it would be unwise to confuse the third sector with the informal sector. For the state as well as international institutions such as the IMF, simply plays the role of a stopgap. The informal sector is not a real development mechanism. It is mainly a survival mechanism. On the other hand, the third sector represent a definite development strategy rooted within a long-term development project, and in which stakeholders become fully conscious participants.

In the South, the emergence of the third sector is due to a great extent to the «development» NGOs. They are its lifeline. These NGOs are grouped around what is commonly termed as community development. This community development work has three main aspects:

Micro-project support work in local communities motivated by the changes they experience in their living conditions in the areas of work, health, housing and education.

Defence of social rights through the organisation of neighbourhood committees, around vital issues such as access to water, electricity etc.. and to collective facilities, for example health and education.

Implementation of measures for local and integrated socio-economic development, which allow local communities to organise themselves

The North as well as the South, however, are still debating the functions of relays and levers in the context of the contribution made by the third sector to the development of a society. Just like their cousins in the North, the new third sector and solidarity economics initiatives in the south are running the

same risk of farming out responsibilities. In order to counter the social impacts of structural adjustment programs, they could very well find themselves replacing the state in the same the areas that the latter has abandoned.

3.3 The third sector North and South: an analysis of common trends

There is no easy answer to those questions. Some see the third sector enterprises as perfect partners to replace public services. The qualities generally attributed to the third sector initiatives (flexibility, speed, creativity, responsibility, and closeness to the people etc.) are seen as means to offer better services at a lesser cost. Others declare that on the contrary, the third sector is the means by which public policies pursue privatisation, and through which social gains are progressively eroded. The first of these answers seems to trivialise the tensions created as the result of the position occupied by the third sector enterprises within an international framework heavily controlled by neoliberal forces. The second answer is the opposite. It underestimate the capacity of the different players to develop their own strategies, that is to say their ability to explore fully the possibilities offered by the third sector, for example by responding to new social needs, by supporting the construction of new types of communities, and by creating public opportunities for the revival of democratic practices.

A third hypothesis, offering both positive and critical arguments, can be considered. It point out the fact that our societies are moving towards a redefinition of the relationships that exist between different people, between the intermediary structures of civil society, between market forces and the state. This redefinition could be leaning towards a greater degree of democratisation. In brief, in the option we favour, nothing is cast in stone. In the North as in the South, the kind of society unfolding from this crisis could be oriented towards a redistribution of responsibilities between the different levels of government, private producers and the third sector organisations.

This hypothesis has the advantage of opening a theoretical and political window, which will give us the opportunity to understand those third sector initiatives that are solidly anchored in the on-going process of social transformation. Are we talking about specks in the ocean or the dawn of a new system? It is difficult, at this stage, to advance a definite answer, simply because the parameters of this future social are not yet fully determined. That is why, at this juncture, a historical look at the third sector in the societies of the North, would be useful.

One of the first lessons to be learnt, a century and a half after its birth, is that the third sector has grown, mainly through cooperation, amidst exploited working classes who were struggling to improve their living conditions. In other words, cooperation was at first, an answer to a number of social needs.

This is the very first, socio-economic, dimension, of our reading chart. As a direct result, one of the role played by the third sector is brought to the fore: that of a relay mechanism in the event of market, or state, failure. For example, consumers' cooperatives were at first an expression, on the part of certain segments of the population, of collective endeavours, meant to meet basic needs at the lowest possible cost possible. For their part, workers co-operatives have been their own response to a capitalist industrialisation system that was robbing them of their work. The third sector took the relay of a market/public economy rendered unable or powerless to resist the tide of new social challenges. But necessity or interest are not enough to explain the success of the third sector in mobilising people. The creation of the third sector enterprises can also be explained by the strong need in people to be part of groups or communities (whether in their working environment, their neighbourhood or their village), the need to have an identity, the need to live together. This is the dimension of movement or lever in the social transformation process. An example of this is the story of the cooperative housing complex in Mondragon, where the Basque identity has been the prime «mover». The same thing is happening in many countries of the South where practices are being developed, according to methods rooted in the third sector principles such as Villa El Salvador, in Peru, an initiative which can be considered as a southern replica of Mondragon.

Some will wonder if the third sector is not also the story of initiatives that became institutionalised when they lost this leveraging dimension? It is true that there is a tendency for a part of these institutions to operate as subsidiary components of the public economy (credit unions) or the market economy (financial cooperatives), in areas where the development model of post-war boom years still has a strong influence. It is precisely during this period that the large institutions of civil society, have, to varying degrees, found that their interest was best served within the framework of a strong social state (working class parties, unions, credit unions and cooperatives). It is also during this period that all the social movements of the day became strongly institutionalised, and consequently saw their proactive mandate considerably weakened. One must also add, however, that during this same period, the third sector made, simultaneously, significant contributions to the construction of a social state. Today, under what conditions can the third sector play the role of lever in the transformation of society? Here are a few approaches, based on the analysis of several of these initiatives:

1) A stronger entrepreneurial capacity in the launching stages of projects, in the search for opportunities, in the networking of projects and enterprises, in the search for self-financing, in the negotiation of a share of the markets, in the implementation of follow-up and support measures. In brief, stronger economic foundations, underpinned by an entrepreneurial culture, would be valuable assets.

2) An integrated system of local development, enabling enterprises to firmly root themselves in the reconstruction of their local territories through the forging of relevant partnerships. This reconstruction goal can be served more particularly through agreements and contracts between community organisations, NGOs, municipalities and cooperative financial institutions.

3) A commitment to develop a pluralistic economy, which implies a more explicit loyalty to another rationale than simply adapting to the market place.

4. Ways of renewing North-South cooperation through solidarity economics

We cannot speak of North-South cooperation in the context of the third sector without mentioning the burgeoning projects and movements around the world which directly reflect a renunciation of social duality. As we have stated earlier, various counter-trends to free-market globalisation are combining to create «alternative» basal structures as a reaction against exclusively market-determined ones. Although weak, these new structures are none the less very real.

In terms of international cooperation, the third sector will only be fully effective if the following three requirements are met: First, international cooperation will have to position itself more explicitly within the emerging global civil society; second, governments and leading international NGOs will have to be more willing to support the third sector and find other ways of taming market forces; and, finally, project agencies, both in the North and the South, will have to develop a more conscious mutual recognition that they share: 1) a common enemy in the form of neo-liberal globalisation; 2) a common goal in the form of responses to economic and social problems, both in the North and the South, which are increasingly interrelated; 3) a possibly common outlook in the form of participation in creating of a new societal and developmental model.

However, it is also going to be necessary that social movement leaders work more in areas such as federating local initiatives, making linkages at the national level, creating national NGO networks and developing closer collaboration with the North's international cooperation organisations (OCI). This type of cooperation increasingly has a ripple effect, as far as the UN. In sum, it would be a mistake to underestimate the political or economic importance of contemporary forces and movements.

First of all, so far as the political arena is concerned, several recent studies on Latin America and Africa have clearly shown the emergence of two powerful new social forces: the NGOS, which, by adapting their approaches, have become, at least partly, «social outcome» organisations; and certain local

governments, which have been getting more and more involved in genuine partnerships or «joint ventures» with both popular movements and the NGOs.

Secondly, in the economic area, several studies have clearly shown the growing importance of the third sector in both North and South: representing more than 12 million jobs (in seven of the twelve countries surveyed), nearly 5% of GDP, 5-7% of jobs, 75% of the business in four key sectors (education, health and social services, culture and recreation) and 13% of all new jobs during the decade 1980-89.

Overall, from now on, it is going to be necessary to take into account the existence of almost 500,000 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the world, more than 20,000 of whom are already networked and linked together by the Internet (the Association for Progressive Communications Network or APC Network). In this context, the challenge is to increase the number of intervention levels (local, regional or federated, national and international) and come to have a major world-wide influence by judiciously adjusting the action level, from the "micro", i.e. local government, to the "macro", i.e. global policy.

North-South Cooperation: the community movement and the third sector as «levers» of international solidarity and development.

Providing they broaden the circle of their partners, NGOs, together with third sector and local development initiatives, can fill a large portion of the gap between "local" and "global" activity? But how can we make them more effective socially? As a first response, current experience indicates that NGOs should set up an authentic international system of funding local development and the third sector.

Secondly, experience also suggests we should not only support local development by setting up community organisations, lending systems, and different forms of cooperative and community

enterprises, we should also increase the number of "North-South" and "Association-NGO-local government" partnerships (and small business if possible) in a general community revival.

Recent developments also point to the value of thinking along the lines of multi-partner projects focusing on specific challenges: for example, joint ventures between unions and cooperatives, Northern and Southern associations, municipalities, Northern small business and their budding Southern counterparts and so on.

Lastly, recent developments also highlight the need to give greater emphasis to research and thought on certain themes which are more closely linked to the main social protagonists: namely. The factors which encourage the development and durability of third economy enterprises and the role of NGOs and churches in the emergence of a new model of society etc.

Although these ideas may appear not very groundshaking, they are based on certain core elements, i.e. concrete challenges and specific local and international groups. They are not especially revolutionary because they avoid both important classic approaches: major confrontation or humanitarian intervention. Their positive value lies in their contribution to the implementation of the four global contracts presented by the Group of Lisbon: the basic needs contract (removal of inequality); the cultural contract (aimed at improving inter-cultural communication); the democratic contract (the world-wide application of new political regulations) and the Earth contract (sustainable development).

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