

SOLIDARITY ECONOMY

Synthesis of Events

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WHAT IS A SOLIDARITY ECONOMY?

Solidarity Economy designates all production, distribution and consumption activities that contribute to the democratization of the economy based on citizens commitments both at a local and global level. Solidarity Economy is a dynamics of reciprocity and solidarity which links individual interests to the collective interest. In this sense, Solidarity Economy is not a sector of the economy, but a transversal approach that includes initiatives in all sectors of the economy. It is about ethical consumption, women's initiatives, community and ecological agriculture, social money, ethical finance, fair trade, community services, appropriate and democratized technology and social forms of ownership and management of assets and of developmental activities.

Solidarity Economy is a strong tool of empowerment and social change that starts from the initiatives of responsible citizens that want to keep control of the way they are producing, consuming, saving, investing, exchanging. It is a model of community-based and locally-based people's economy. We may call it grassroots economy. Solidarity Economy constructs a sustainable development from civil society taking State policies and resources only as complementary to their own actions and resources. It makes the economy accountable with ethical standards.

Solidarity Economy should not be a simple instrument to achieve a fairer framework for economic activity but should instead be the subject and main agent of a social, economic, political and cultural transformation.

SOLIDARITY ECONOMY IN THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM 2003

1 Panel, 8 Seminars and 120 Workshops were held during the WSF03, coordinated by 19 Solidarity Economy networks that interactively prepared these events.

We estimate that a total of about 6.000 – 7.000 people attended the panel, the seminars and the workshops. Behind the practices of Solidarity Economy represented in the WSF there are millions of workers, producers, consumers, traders, educators and communicators around the world.

We, Solidarity Economy networks present at the WSF, established a multinational, multicultural collective dynamics with a common core program and a collective process of synthesis.

In one of our sessions, we had the presence of the Brazilian Minister of Labor and the newly named National Secretary of Solidarity Economy. At this occasion, the National Secretary made public the official announcement of the creation of this Secretariat.

KEY ISSUES DEBATED

1. Solidarity Economy is at the heart of socio-economic innovations, which allow progressive forces to construct an alternative to neo-liberal economics and to existing economic institutions.
2. Solidarity Economy is a growing grassroots movement of people and communities for whom building economic alternatives to neo-liberal economic development is essential to their immediate survival and collective political empowerment.
3. Solidarity Economy has emerged from a growing demand by workers, peasants and consumers to move beyond resistance and have access to new ways to produce and consume based on ethical values and on an equitable and sustainable set of relationships.
4. The World Social Forum must provide a space for the voices of the millions of people who are involved daily in creating economic alternatives at the local, regional, national and international level.
5. Solidarity Economy organizations and networks present at the WSF are actively involved in the globalization of solidarity through cooperation and exchanges of products and of concrete practices based on shared values.
6. Solidarity Economy proposes a vision and practice of development that places culture, agriculture, social culture and financial solidarity culture at the heart of the construction of an "another world". This integration is an important contribution to the dynamics of the WSF.
7. The integration of the Solidarity Economy in the WSF agenda will allow this movement to be better articulated on a global political level and to reinforce international networks and coordination.

CONVERGENCES

- Common feeling of the need to construct a common agenda at the international level among the organizations and networks in the field of Solidarity Economy, which promotes mutual knowledge and the identification of existing convergences.
- Common understanding of the need to advance in the articulation and international convergence of the organizations and local communities active in the practices of Solidarity Economy.
- Recognition of the need to combine the local dynamics of these practices within the broader national and international macroeconomic contexts, especially concerning international exchanges.
- Common feeling of the singularity and the relevance of women in the development of Solidarity Economy practices. Solidarity Economy is balanced in gender.
- Common statement that production, trade, services, finance and consumption have to be based on social ownership and management of the means to produce and reproduce life.

DIVERGENCES

On the one hand, the understanding by some actors that Solidarity Economy is an alternative development model to the capitalist economy. On the other hand, other actors see it as merely a complementary model to the existing system.

ISSUES NOT RESOLVED - CHALLENGES

- The identification and the mapping of all the organizations and networks at the national and international levels.
- The identification of common standards and socioeconomic and environmental indicators.
- A more structured international articulation.
- New national and international juridical structures and institutions adapted to the innovative nature of a work-centered economy.

STRATEGIES

- Building a common map (identification of actors, database, etc.) of the organizations and networks engaged in Solidarity Economy in order to promote the common knowledge and exchanges, including of goods and services, between them.
- Constructing an international articulation with the existing processes, realities, networks, concepts and practices.
- Identifying socioeconomic and environmental indicators capable of detecting the full costs of economic activity and adapted to the realities of these practices.
- Identifying strategic alliances with other actors, such as trade unions, social and cultural movements, religious institutions, and political actors.
- Active citizens of Solidarity Economy should be, and continue to be, working on two fronts: one, resistance to and change of the existing relations and institutions of global capitalism (on issues and campaigns like Jubilee South for a Millennium without Debt, the Global Citizens' Initiative for equitable international trade, ATTAC, the Continental Campaign against the Free Trade Area of the Americas/ALCA, etc.); the other front is socioeconomic innovation and transformation: creating an economy based on the respect of diversity, cooperation and solidarity.

PROPOSALS

- Extend the outreach of the global networking process of Solidarity Economy, with the integration of new organizations and networks.
- Establish a permanent dialogue and mutual support with the social movements.
- Establish a permanent dialogue with the WSF.
- Propose an agenda of discussions with the International Council of the WSF in order to reinforce the presence of Solidarity Economy within the dynamics of the WSF.

LEITMOTIV – FUNDAMENTAL GUIDELINES

- There is no possibility of political and social transformation if there is no economic transformation.
- The main subject of a sustainable political, socioeconomic and cultural development should be the people themselves.

- “Another world is possible” only if the transformation of economic values, structures and relations is built from within the person, the community and the existing world. Our ultimate goal is a cooperative globalization of solidarity, an economy (from the Greek: eco - nomia) recreated as “the management and care (nomia) of the home (oikos)”, from the household all the way to Planet Earth.

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19 networks from different countries helped organize the Solidarity Economy events of the WSF2003