

SOLIDARITY ECONOMY, NETWORKS AND CYCLES: THE FORCE OF THE SOCIAL IMAGINARY

*Heloisa Spring, July 2005*¹

0. In search for a sense for these reflections

As a contribution for the debate and the collective construction of a *plural* vision of the Solidarity Economy, I have believed appropriate to transmit into the space of the workshop VISION some ideas which come from my practice in the last decade, also plural, that is to say, from the academy, from the professional activity in different kinds of non-profits, either from actors of the bases of the civil society or of those who intend to accomplish the mission of "consultants" when it isn't guided by the first ones, and also from the perspective to integrate a number of social actors, in which State, market and civil society are shown as a continuum of responsibilities that can't be interrupted, more than for opportunism of survival. Material and/or intellectual one.

I don't find it trivial to underline the character of *pluralism* like option whose permanency we should watch over in that construction, since the dominant paradigm – hegemonic ranging from the collective unconscious to the same reproductive logic of the institutions of all kinds - takes frequently and automatically to a compulsion to the "pensée unique" and the *rejection of the difference*, that our implicit epistemologies hinders to discern. At least, here in our Western and Christian small world.

In other words, I will try (and I promise not to speak collectively whenever the taking the responsibility of the personal option for the announced ideas, regardless of whether they are personal or collective) to transmit some contributions that have been built from a renovation of the analysis of terms that the common sense threats to crystallize, hindering the production of innovation: *paradigm and ideologies, power, responsibilities and potentialities*, in relation to their possibility to renovate - without unifying - possible visions for Solidarity Economy.

1. On paradigms and ideologies: solving eagerly the enigma of the egg and the hen

The word *paradigm* has been transformed, and sometimes wasted, for an abusive use throughout the last decades, in the sense that "difference" to which we want to grant relevance is quickly assimilated to "another paradigm." Like anything else, there are options. We choose to consider as "paradigm" that group of beliefs, theories and epistemologies - consciously or unconsciously - derived from the normal Science² and that the revolutionary Science will only be coined in its next cycle, when the quantity of present anomalies is enough so that the scientific community accepts the "failure" of the previous theory and it sinks it totally or partially, together with its original paradigm.

The problem is that the common sense isn't soaked so automatically into the dominant paradigm to adopt the revolutionary and the scientists - as always and thus and Scientometry shows – go on speaking alone in their feuds. That maybe is not so serious for the Physics, but something more dramatic as a consequence is that the Social Sciences still continue living in the Newtonian paradigm, pretending to be in evolution, to the vanguard of the explanation of the social fact, although already given up to the unforeseeable character of their formulations... It is at that time when the possibility exists - almost always vacant - that the scientist intervenes from his *civic responsibility* to contribute in some other way for the *transformation of the real world in real time*: it is at that time when he can choose to leave the sterile discussion in the realm of the science, to accept the state of paradigmatic transition, if he believes to be inside it, and to head for the ideology, without problems, to take his responsibility in this construction that neither has the visible horizon yet nor is object of the science, normal or revolutionary - of the Solidarity Economy

We all know that the Newtonian paradigm even goes on covering the Economic Science perfectly whose objective to seize the laws of the administration of scarce resources for always growing needs, has not yet waken up for the change given by its bastard sister - the technology - that has been able to

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² Kuhn, T.S.(1972) *La estructura de las revoluciones científicas*. México, Fondo de Cultura Económica.

make abundant what seemed³ to be lacking before so that the human being could have food to survive...

But paradigm and ideologies are relatives that go bad and they claim authority one on the another:

Who comes first? Is it possible to have / adopt / build / reconstruct an ideology out of a paradigm? Is it possible to live out of a paradigm? In what paradigm do we live?

As all those that adopt the flag of the Solidarity Economy, we also live in that room of questions and to avoid paralysis we have opted to choose that the *paradigm* comes first, it's previous to the individual possibility to rationalize which conditions, therefore, the same formulation and election of beliefs... and therefore the *ideology* that we embrace, both in theory (that is to say, in our declaratory acts, in our words of the professional, political environment or of the private life) and in the social practices to those that stick, in my understanding, more rigorous mirror of the ideologies.

It isn't without consequences. Nor responsibilities. Some new ones, others ratified. As we will see below. The scientist's *civic responsibility* would come then to be part of an *ideology* - another type of option - and would leave in the same paradigm to more than an ideology... situation that would not please equally to Greek and Trojan, mainly to the Greek followers of the "pensée unique." Here we join with the Trojans by understanding them as more subversive in relation to the instituted order.

2. Vision of a new economy : multiple possible paths?

When we observe the growth of the initiatives which are included within the Solidarity Economy, it is easy to recognize their diversity and heterogeneity. It is complex to face with their contradictions and the nonexistence of completed examples of a "new" Economy, in all their dimensions. There is always some privileged aspect: either the production or the commercialization or the consumption. Also, when the production is observed, sometimes the product and sometimes the process is privileged. Contrarily, when we observe the theoretical scarce production in the experiences of land, we can say that the innovations in their description and interpretation are rather poor and posthumous. Up to now we cannot say that they have contributed to advance. In any case, they aren't at the height of a strategy that is born with vocation to generate Utopia. The stage of the *description of what exists* is rarely overcome, always made from within the *hegemonic paradigm* and what helps you is rather an outpost on the ideological thing that on the theoretical production: a strong commitment is verified with the need of a substantial change in the rules of the social game, but from an enough similar reasoning to itself for several decades, as if the theoretical categories could remain stable to explain phenomena that don't cease to be renewed.

Luckily, the technology comes winning to the science and provoking the reflection on its same ashes: new social practices settle down without requesting permission to the academy and this goes behind events that one can neither foresee nor inspire. Nor to explain creatively.

Starting from the acceptance that the dominant paradigm is a condition of the production of all knowledge - vulgar or scientific – let's understand the historical framework in which the Solidarity Economy is born and to share some discoveries that come contributing to go out of the dominant paradigm by multiple doors. I will refer here especially to three fertile contributions that I want to outline here, from the adhesion or the polemic at first sight. I hope not from the neutrality or the indifference...

In the decade of 1970s, when Latin America was shaken by the Doctrine of National Security, a movement of resistance of the popular sectors supported in a theory of the power of the systemic and holistic family was produced and it generated a number of discussion centers and multiple application forms that achieved to reach more than two million people willing to look at the world with other eyeglasses and to act from them. In last WFS 2005, Waldemar De Gregori, the creator of that renovating focus drove a seminar for the presentation of those ideas, with the format of popularization for the great public, in which he presented his *Proportionalist Manifesto* and he made a proposal of triadic Utopia for the humanity's cycle. In our Colibrí Project (www.redlases.org.ar) we have adopted

³ Lietaer, B. (2001) *The future of money: Creating new wealth, work and a wiser world*. London, Century

the pattern and we are advancing in a combined creation of tools dedicated to a better management of the power inside the groups and to cultivate the integrality of the potentialities of the human beings, groups and organizations. It is essentially about the global vision of the individual, of group and of societies which puts together and permanently a triadic vision of the human beings and their members: the individual is always to *think*, to *feel* and to *act*, in the same way that the society contains the *science, the art and the economy*, expression of the intelligence of its three brains. The groups and organizations always show three subgroups in conflict for the power, the one that can be creative and not destructive, as expression that is of the same life.

Starting from the decade of 1980s and 1990s, Humberto Maturana, Francisco Varela and Fernando Flores inaugurate the School of Santiago, that proposes a new constructivist epistemology for the sciences and the daily life. Among some of the provocations that I found more inspiring I can mention:

* *There is nothing outside of our minds: everything is but an interpretation.*

** *The obscenity is never in the picture, but in the Observer's look.*

*** *Whatever we do, we make it from the language: we are what we affirm, we declare, we request, we offer and we promise. And accomplish.*

**** *To make History is to listen to the world of sense of one's culture and produce new offers that reveal a new world of sense, recognized as superior to the previous one.*

It is at the end of 1990s that the Belgian economist Bernard Lietaer, one of the authors of the first project of European currency and world referent of the complementary currencies, intends to revise the basis of the economic science from the optics of C.G Jung and his archetypes of the collective unconscious. For him, the overcoming analysis of the economy and the money is based on that author's work because he was the only one who built a framework approach of the collective Psychology and the money, without any doubts, it is a phenomenon of collective Psychology. The key concept of Jung is that the money is an *emotional field* that mobilizes people singularly or collectively towards a particular direction. Jung showed that whenever a particular archetype is repressed, two types of shades emerge that are polarities one of the another. For example, if the superior being corresponding to the role of king or queen is repressed, I will either behave as a tyrant or either as a coward. Those two shades are connected one to the another through the fear. One is this way tyrant fearing to look weak, while the weak one is afraid of looking as tyrant; only somebody without fear of those two shades can attain the Sovereign's archetype. If now we apply this framework to that well-recorded phenomenon of the repression of the GREAT MOTHER archetype - we see that the Great Mother archetype was very important in the Western world, in the dawn of the prehistory through the pre-Indo-European period and it is even so in current many traditional cultures. But that archetype has been violently repressed in West, at least during 5.000 years, starting from the Indo-European invasions, reinforced by the Jew-Christian (anti-goddess) cosmopolitan vision and that they culminated with three centuries of witch-hunting throughout the Victorian era.

If the repression of that archetype exists, then in that scale and for that period of time, the shades are manifested in a very powerful and at the same time transparent way in the society. After 5.000 years, one can understand that people consider the shade behavior as "normal." The question Lietaer wondered was very simple: *Which are the shades of the Great Mother archetype?* Their answer is that these shades are the *greed and the fear to the shortage*. This way, it is not surprising that in the Victorian time, in the climax of the Great Mother's repression, a Scottish school teacher called Adam Smith observed a lot of greed and shortage in his surroundings, assuming that that was the "normal" way as civilized societies were thus operated. Adam Smith shaped this way the modern economy that can be defined from that paradigm like a way to distribute or to administer scarce resources through the individual and personal mechanism of the *greed and the fear to the shortage*...

Almost simultaneously, Margrit Kennedy in Germany had the illumination to see the impossibility that growth curves, unparallel with the economic growth and the growth of bank interest, is accompanied stably in the evolution of societies. Possibly, the excessive simplicity of its elegant and fine ideology prevented that this was taken seriously by the colleagues of the academy and the decision-makers of the big financial institutions... For luck, her Regio model goes well, having more and more chances of

discussion and support in experiences located in Europe and we can wait a much quicker evolution of those ideas in next years (www.monnet.org).

But it is without a doubt in the experience of the networks of exchange of Argentina that during almost seven years well the *paradigm of the abundance* was expressed through the emission of a private currency that meant - although for a short while - the conquest of the political sovereignty which had been denied many centuries ago... A group that began with 23 people practicing multi-reciprocal exchanges in 1995 attained to gather to more than 6 million participants in networks distributed all over the whole country, showing that *another market was possible* and even of gigantic proportions...

And what happened? The surrounding crisis won the battle and it imposed again the *paradigm of the shortage*: few accumulated official money obtained with the sale of the "social" currencies... just as it happens with the other currency.

Luckily, Brazil has today a National Secretary of the Solidarity Economy whose holder has enough academic merits to declare openly that that economy can be characterized by three of its more representative structures: rural initiatives of MST⁴, the experiences of the workers' self-management and "barter clubs" where a complementary currency is used, enabling to reconstruct a market without money... That is without doubts a latent hope, to which we should pay attention.

Anyway, as far as I understand, what is today even incomprehensible is that these ideas go on being only discussed by "experts" of the field of the complementary currencies, local currencies, distributive currencies or social currencies, as if the question of the money were indifferent or secondary on planning a new economy! I sustain that it is about ignoring the own ORIGINAL SIN of the Economy and therefore to limit our possibilities to advance for deeper paths toward the ultimate purpose of the Solidarity Economy that goes enough beyond a form to make "economy" and that is destined to build a new plural, fairer and more equal, economic, social and environmentally sustainable model of societies.

3. To where do we go? To where can we go?

A pending debt of the initiatives within the Solidarity Economy – regardless of what the adopted classification is - is the *dialogue* and the *integration* of the different successful strategies of new counter-hegemonic models, with enough openness to discover new "original sins" that our current paradigm or exclusive ideologization hide unfailingly.

Also, we should be alert for the traps of the "pensée unique" in their subtler versions that, in the micro-dynamic of the closed groups and the voracious institutions, no matter how much attempts are made to camouflage with the denomination of "networks", they watch and prevent from building a plural vision of the Solidarity Economy.

In our path, of the hand of those new paradigms, we try permanently to avoid the crystallization of our more stable thoughts and we are devoted to the exercise of the construction of proposals that work like it alerts against the pensée unique and the paradigm of the shortage:

** Institutions are not more than hegemonic speeches that protect corporate interests, sometimes implicit and contradictory with the declarations of objectives of their practices.*

*** Networks don't exist in the material world, but we treat them as if they existed. Are they merely mental constructions dedicated to institutionalize new relationships of power, rejecting what is instituted and appealing to the institutive capacity like controlled rebellion: resource of the oppressed that some poetic licenses are given?*

In another environment, once we have liberated the realm of dispute of paradigms and ideologies that took us so much free time, we have reformulated our initial program of diffusion of the social currencies as strategy of construction of an economic new order and we have accepted the challenge of V. Forrester of "making politics from the actors of the economy", but having clarity in relation to it.

⁴ Movimiento de los Trabajadores Rurales Sin Tierra(Movement of Landless Rural Workers)

The Colibrí Project, being implanted in several countries of the Latin America region(www.redlases.org.ar) and aiming to form and to put in network to 1500 promoters in next three years, ceased to be a program "of Solidarity Economy" to be a program in which this is part of the political strategies of construction of a responsible and plural world with solidarity and with all that represents it: it is, in each geographical area, about rescuing the cultural thing, reactivating the local resources of any type, undertaking new projects aligned with a collective vision to five and ten years, using for it all the forms of production, commercialization, consumption and solidarity finances... Curiously, their launching almost always includes a fair where a social currency takes place which is used and destroyed at the end of the event. To show that the paradigm of the abundance is rather a question of *power of the imagination* that of subsidies of the rich to the poor.

Some of their axioms, guarantors of the new paradigm whose extension we still can't know because we are building it, are:

- * ***Power is a permanent, unavoidable, necessary and creative game.***
- ** ***The planet is abundance and has resources for the good life of all its inhabitants.***
- *** ***We are always responsible of All and not only the concerning part.***

I hope to have contributed to enrich the debate of the workshop and, at the same time, have made justice to Albert Einstein when he sustained that "*No problem can be solved within the theoretical framework that generated it*"...

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