



**UNRISD**  
United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

## **The Hidden Side of Social and Solidarity Economy**

### **Social Movements and the “Translation” of SSE into Policy (Latin America)**

*Ana Cecilia Dinerstein*

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## Acronyms

<b>AD</b>	Alternative Development
<b>AT</b>	Argentina Trabaja ( <i>Argentina Works</i> )
<b>CDD</b>	Community Driven Development
<b>CTDAV</b>	Coordinadora de Trabajadores Desocupados Aníbal Verón ( <i>Unemployed Workers Network Aníbal Verón</i> )
<b>EZLN</b>	Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional ( <i>The Zapatista National Liberation Army</i> )
<b>HM</b>	Hope as Method
<b>JBG</b>	Juntas del Buen Gobierno ( <i>Good Government Councils</i> )
<b>INAES</b>	Instituto Nacional de Asociativismo y Economía Social ( <i>National Institute of Cooperatives and Social Economy</i> )
<b>MDS</b>	Ministerio de Desarrollo Social ( <i>Ministry for Social Development</i> )
<b>MST</b>	Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra ( <i>Brazil's Rural Landless Workers Movement</i> )
<b>NAFTA</b>	North American Free Trade Agreement
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>RIPESS</b>	Red Intercontinental para la promoción de la economía social y Solidaria / Réseau Intercontinental de promotion de l'économie sociale solidaire ( <i>Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of the Social and Solidarity Economy</i> )
<b>SAA</b>	San Andres Accords
<b>UWO</b>	Unemployed Worker Organization

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## Summary

International organizations and governmental institutions are increasingly interested in obtaining support from social movements and SSE organizations for new public policies and laws that encourage their engagement and participation from below, and facilitate their access to the new policy schemes. This underscores the growing importance of civil society actors (including social movements) in rethinking “development” and in devising and effecting development policy, particularly in the current period of global crisis.

This paper addresses another concern resulting from this disposition of international development policy with regards to social movements—namely, the process of translation of SSE practices into state policy. Translation here refers to the processes, mechanisms and dynamics through which the state incorporates into policy the cooperative and solidarity ethos of SSE practised by social movements. The problem that arises is that the state tends to fit SSE into the logic of power rather than enabling the transformative aspects of SSE to flourish.

Drawing on the example of three well-known Latin American movements—the Zapatista Movement in Mexico, the Unemployed Workers Movement in Argentina and Brazil’s Rural Landless Workers Movement—the paper examines the tension underpinning SSE practices and the state, and how the former can be subordinated to the logic of the state with significant implications for emancipatory politics and practice.

Ana Cecilia Dinerstein is Associate Professor in the Department of Social and Policy Sciences and a Member of the Centre for Development Studies at the University of Bath in the United Kingdom.



## Introduction

We strongly believe not only that another world is possible, but also that it is increasingly necessary (Manifesto of the European Network of Social and Solidarity Economy, Barcelona, 2011).<sup>1</sup>

There is growing interest within international organizations and governmental institutions in obtaining support from social movements and SSE organizations for new public policies and laws that encourage their engagement and participation from below, and facilitate their access to the new policy schemes (Fonteneau et al. 2010; UNRISD 2010). This underscores the growing importance of civil society actors (including social movements) in rethinking “development” and in devising and effecting development policy, particularly in the current period of global crisis.

In this paper I address another concern emanating from this disposition of international development policy with regards to social movements—namely the process of *translation* of SSE practices into state policy. By translation I mean the processes, mechanisms and dynamics through which the state incorporates the cooperative and solidarity ethos of the SSE practised by social movements into policy. The problem lies in that, in order to integrate SSE practices into policy, the state tends to demarcate a terrain that, as Vázquez (2011:36) suggests with reference to the epistemic violence of modernity, “renders invisible everything that does not fit in the ‘parameters of legibility’ of [its] epistemic territory”. In this case, translation entails the subjugation of the emancipatory dimension of SSE into the logic of power rather than enabling the transformative aspects of SSE to flourish. Drawing on the example of three well-known Latin American movements, I examine the tension underpinning SSE practices and the state, and how the former can be subordinated to the logic of the state with significant implications for emancipatory politics and practice.

### ***The struggle over the meaning of SSE***

For the past two decades, civil society organizations and social movements—particularly in the Global South—have been experimenting with non-profit forms of local and cooperative production, distribution, land occupation and use, driven by communal values, and organized thorough collective decision-making processes and direct participation of those involved in these endeavours. Many of these movements belong to national and transnational networks such as the Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of the Social and Solidarity Economy (RIPESS), which are concerned with facilitating the development of the SSE as well as rendering it visible worldwide.

These pioneering developments have received attention from critical scholars who propose participatory and “people-centred development” (Nieverdeen Pieterse 1998). Under the “Alternative Development” (AD) paradigm, the SSE offers a critique of the liberal vision of development, for it embraces the principles of collective property, distribution of wealth to meet the needs of people rather than capital; freedom of association and autonomous decision-making (Dacheaux and Goujon 2012:206 and 208). The AD discourse encourages associative forms of production, sustainable development, the economic support for the marginalized through the provision of land and housing,

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.ripesseu.net/en/presentation/manifest.html>, accessed on 7 July 2014.

women's empowerment and the revival of "the local" (Santos and Rodríguez Garavito 2006; Escobar 1992).

However, while AD introduces elements of solidarity and proposes changes in the type and scope of growth, it neither challenges the market economy (Coraggio 2010) nor "the concept of economic growth *per se*" (Santos and Rodríguez Garavito 2006: xxxix-xl). This is problematic for many who believe that human realization cannot be attained by means of improving the management of capitalism and the distribution of wealth (Esteva 2010). Many social movements repudiate the "growth" development model and see themselves as articulating alternatives to development, with SSE being at the heart of these elaborations around the notion of *buen vivir* (living well).

In Latin America, SSE movements and networks diagnosed that capitalism is undergoing a multiple, interconnected and unparalleled crisis that combines ecological, energy, food, environmental, poverty and hunger crises, which are matched with the increase in the means of violence and social control by nation states and the free movement of global capital. While important strands within the SSE movement actively support forms of social enterprise that fit comfortably with the AD paradigm, others embrace a more radical paradigm that, as Utting (2012) suggests, "call for very different growth, production and consumption patterns, and power relations". Since the pressure for growth is embedded in capitalism (Smith 2011), these radical strands of SSE claim that we are required to engage with "alternative visions of democracy, economy and society" (Escobar 1992:22) and non-capitalist political practices (see Coraggio 2011). They disagree with the idea that "capitalist efficiency and resource allocation is the best we can come up with" (Smith 2011) with SSE contributing to this. As Smith highlights, "this belief is incompatible with an ecological economy". Gudynas calls it "the dream of benevolent capitalism" (2012a). Conceived in this way, SSE "seeks to change the whole social and economic system and put forward a different paradigm of development that upholds solidarity economy principles" (Kawano 2013): SSE would be about "re-socializing economic relations" (Gibson-Graham 2006:79).

As a counter-hegemonic practice, SSE is inherently *political* and it is located at the centre of a broader debate about the viability and desirability of capitalism. In Latin America, where the crisis of capitalism is explained as a "crisis of civilization", that is an impossibility of (re)production of dignified human life on the planet (Lander 2010), has become a political laboratory of SSE practices. Alternative socioeconomic arrangements

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