

POPULAR ECONOMY IN THE SOUTH, THIRD SECTOR IN THE NORTH: ARE THEY SIGNS OF A GERMINATING ECONOMY OF SOLIDARITY?*

by

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ABSTRACT:** *This article compares some components of the so-called informal sector in countries of the North and of the South. We establish a parallel between the movements of the popular economy in the South and the social economy (third sector) in the North (Santiago de Chile and Belgium are the respective illustrative cases). Although the institutional contexts differ, we emphasize the similarities in evolution induced by the corresponding modes of regulation. Both the popular economy developing in the large cities of the Third World and the nonprofit organizations emerging in the North are a challenge to dominant modes of regulation, in particular to the 'state-market synergy'. Both have also given rise to an abundant literature which puts theoretical frameworks, particularly the economist's, into question. Modes of regulation still remain locked into the market/nonmarket dilemma, and this seems to indicate a certain 'blindness' to the plurality of modes of organization which are intermeshed in socio-economic life. We would like to overcome this binary picture and show the fruitfulness of an approach to economics which takes into account a mixture of principles. Such combinations exclude neither the market nor the state, but do not reduce to them. This draws out the contours of a new mode of economic regulation, one which certainly challenges the philosophy of 'all to the market', but whose potential is nevertheless rooted in existing economic practices.*

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** *Résumé en fin d'article; Zusammenfassung am Ende des Artikels; resúmen al fin del artículo.*

1 Introduction

This article compares components of the so-called informal sector in countries of the North and of the South. We shall establish a parallel between the movements of the popular economy in the South and the social economy (third sector) in the North, taking Santiago de Chile and Belgium¹ as illustrative cases, respectively. Although the institutional contexts differ, our aim is to emphasize the similarities in evolution induced by the corresponding modes of regulation. These forms of socio-economic organization require new modes of regulation, because traditional analyses and policies take insufficient account of the specificity of this kind of socio-economic activity. Both the popular economy developing in the cities of Third World countries and the nonprofit organizations emerging in the North in particular challenge the 'market-state synergy'.

Part 2 offers an historical analysis of the emergence and evolution of the popular economy in the South and of the social economy in the North. The epistemological challenges are discussed in Part 3. Both the popular economy developing in the big cities of the Third World and the nonprofit organizations emerging in the North have given rise to an abundant literature which questions existing theoretical frameworks, particularly the economist's. Since they introduce specific forms of socio-economic organization, these phenomena challenge the way in which modern models of development conceive of the market-state relationship.

Finally, Part 4, looks at the political issues raised by this reading of the facts. Modes of regulation still remain locked into the market-nonmarket dilemma, and this seems to indicate a certain 'blindness' to the plurality of modes of organization which are intermeshed in socio-economic life. We would like to overcome this binary picture and show the fruitfulness of an approach to economics which takes account of the mixture of principles. Such an approach excludes neither the market nor the state, but it does not reduce to them. This draws out the contours of a new mode of economic regulation, one which certainly challenges 'all to the market', but whose potential is nevertheless rooted in already existing economic practices.

1 The French sector 'économie sociale' covers the economic activities of the cooperative, mutual and nonprofit organizations. The term has no exact equivalent in English. However, the main issue behind all these concepts is the recognition of a real entrepreneurial dynamic, quite different from a capitalist process and the economic initiative of the public authorities.

2 The emergence of the so-called 'informal' economy

The very term 'informal economy' seems to escape traditional models. It looks as though in this case the imprecise and clumsy language of the analysts had anticipated, by groping in the dark, a difficulty of the dominant economic paradigm and of the models of development which are connected with it. In fact, it is essential to stress that this is far from being a marginal phenomenon or a sort of aberration linked to a local institutional context. To the contrary, the informal sector exists both in the North and in the South of our planet.² For the South, we shall be looking at Chile, which witnessed a transformation of its informal sector during the severe neo-liberal cure imposed by dictator Pinochet's government (1973–88). In the North, the social economy movement never really disappeared. It is emerging anew today with the economic crisis. We will analyse more particularly the Belgian experience.

2.1 In the South: the case of Santiago de Chile³

Ever since it was coined in a well known study for the Internal Labor Organization (ILO) on employment policy in Kenya (1972), the concept of an 'informal sector' has spread through the development literature. Starting in the 1970s, several studies showed evidence of urban, informal, unstructured economic activities which allowed masses migrants to survive in Third World metropolises: small street businesses, production and service workshops, and so on. At the time, analysts were trying to explain why the level of unemployment in Third World cities appeared low, given the gap between the number of people who had come from the countryside and the limited capacity of industries to employ them. What these analyses showed was that, in fact, the popular sphere was in full activity.

In the context of large Third World cities, the popular world has some very specific characteristics. It is made up of all the inhabitants of peripheral urban areas who, mostly under precarious economic conditions, develop relationships and modes of conduct in reference to

2 For a discussion of the concept of the 'informal sector' in the South, see below.

3 For more details, see also Larreachea and Nyssens (1994a, 1994b) and Nyssens (1994).

that space.⁴ Our belief is that despite the heterogeneity of the population in these peripheries, these characteristics have become a genuine identity reference as the concepts of 'worker' or 'proletarian' have lost their appeal. The popular sphere is thus 'embedded' in a 'situated' social, political, economic and cultural reality (Polanyi 1983, Granovetter 1992), and it is developing specific modes of socio-economic organization. In Third World cities, the so-called 'informal sector' thus subsumes these various forms of popular urban economy.

Although interest in the 'informal' sector arose in the 1970s, it is instructive to study the emergence of and changes in this popular economy through the history of development. The latter unfolded within changing institutional contexts which deeply influenced its nature. Chile is a good illustration of this. The history of that country shows evidence of a popular economy rooted in the cities and which, already in the 19th century, generated a dense 'social productive' fabric on the fringe of the activities of large merchants (Salazar 1991). There was an expansion of establishments organized mainly by family groups, where waged employment was little used, and where technology utilized local and generally cheap resources with a low capital-labour ratio. This industrial sector generated a multifaceted 'social productive culture' which shaped the popular identity. Artisans developed numerous associations, thanks to which they were able to organize, among other things, health care, education, saving and social protection (Grez 1990). This popular productive movement provided a bottom-up form of industrialization, as opposed to the authoritarian, free-trade movement imposed by national and foreign elites.

With the development of capitalist industry during the second half of the 19th century, these artisans gradually disappeared. An ever larger proportion of the technology was imported, so that local resources were no longer utilized. The victory of capitalist industry resulted from the fight between two modes of production, the 'local social productive' one and that of the mercantile elite. This elite attempted to establish a monopoly. Since it was closely associated with the classes in power, state regulations were favourable to its development. Thus, it was not the industry rising up from the bottom which triumphed, but rather the industry imposed and imported by the big merchants and protected by the state.

4 In Chile, so-called '*poblaciones*'; in Argentina, '*villas miseria*'; in Brazil, '*favelas*'; and so on.

During the first decades of the 20th century, a proletariat connected with the budding industry emerged and living conditions grew increasingly precarious for a whole fringe of the population, especially in the cities. In that new context the project of modernization took shape. Industrial progress was presented as the key to resolving the 'social question'. A consensus was born between the various parties: the state, industry and the populace. The popular economy of the artisans and shopkeepers was completely excluded in this national modernization project. It is clear, nevertheless, that it never ceased to exist. In 1950, it represented more than 20 per cent of the workforce in Santiago. In 1970, it still employed about 15 per cent. However, this popular economy lost its self-organizing impetus, which shifted towards initiatives of a more militant type (Razeto 1991). It was no longer as much of a social actor as it had been in the late 19th century; it no longer carried a 'project'. In this context of rising proletarianization, the associative movement which had appeared at the end of the 19th century, mainly around the artisans, grew progressively into a set of worker protection organizations. They demanded more intervention by the state both in the market and in the shaping of social policies (education, housing, etc.). These actions were part of an attempt to integrate into a 'modern' way of life, a modernizing model of development whose central element was the diffusion of the concept, the presence and the power of the state.

When Allende came to power in 1970, the policies of the Unidad Popular rested on the ideological premise that society was polarized into two main classes: the exploited workers on the one hand, the capitalists on the other. It has by now been recognized that this reduction of all social relationships to this single polarity was one of the Unidad Popular's fundamental mistakes. In this picture the whole of the popular economy (representing more than 20 per cent of the active population) was identified with the proletarian class. The popular economy was thus excluded by the policies which centred on the 'working class'. Similarly, efforts were focused on raising class consciousness around the 'worker' identity, to the detriment of the *poblador* identity (the inhabitant of the popular urban quarters) which had been forged all through the century and had crystallized a whole range of projects and demands. Any '*pobladores*' movement was thus directly assimilated to the Chilean road towards socialism.

After the coup of 1973, the national elite was again free to deploy its mercantile culture (free trade, open economy), which it had developed up to the beginning of the century. The popular world for the most part slumped into a situation of extreme economic precariousness. Many

people who had acquired a certain level of education and had integrated the economy's 'formal sector' were expelled from the productive system. As a result, the cultural, social and political landscape of the popular sector was modified by the arrival of people with more developed abilities for work, participation, organization, and so on, and with a stronger social consciousness. The traditional social network of the popular world was dismantled by the repression of traditional popular participatory institutions (political parties, trade unions, neighbourhood committees, etc.). Because of the conjunction of these two phenomena (the new cultural, social and economic landscape of the popular sector and radicalization through exclusion and poverty), the political repression organized by the regime turned out to be a strong stimulus for the *pobladores* to organize social protest activities and to try to uphold a certain capacity for political, economic and cultural resistance. Thus, after discarding it for several decades, economic analysis rediscovered the popular economy, suddenly renamed the 'informal sector'. The size of the so-called 'informal sector' grew from 15 per cent of the workforce in Santiago in 1970 to approximately 20 per cent at the time of the 1982 crisis. With the coming to power of Pinochet, the popular economic strategies multiplied and also changed qualitatively. Since then, there has been much internal reorganization between different units, and associative initiatives have appeared alongside the family-run *micro-empresas*. These popular economy organizations (PEOs) are made up of groups of *pobladores* in a given neighbourhood, in areas such as consumption, production and the distribution of goods and services. The popular economy became a powerful means of resistance against the popular world's political, cultural and social exclusion and its economic precariousness. There are very few data available concerning the popular economy during the dictatorship (especially in the beginning), since the PEOs were repressed by the authoritarian regime. However, thanks to the commitment of various researchers and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), there are many monographs describing the strategies of the popular world during the years of the Pinochet regime.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, these popular economic activities have undergone profound changes. They make up a very heterogeneous reality. On the one hand, there are several different forms of organization (communitarian PEOs, family-run *micro-empresas*, individual initiatives, etc.). On the other, within each of these modes of organization, there are several strongly differentiated levels of development (ranging from survival-oriented activities to activities

Table 1—Structure of the popular economy

	PEO	Family businesses	Informal individual initiatives	Charitable initiatives	Illegal activities
Life strategies	Self-managed workshops	Productive workshops	Taxi drivers	Housing organizations	Drug smuggling
Subsistence strategies	Food buyers' groups	Small retail stores	Small repairs	Beneficiaries of charitable institutions	Clandestine alcohol selling
Survival strategies	Soup kitchens	Junk collection and resale	Street vendors	Begging	Petty theft

Razeto and Calcagni (1989)

witnessing substantial growth). Using these two criteria, we can identify different situations arising within the popular economy (Table 1).

The profound changes which Chilean society went through during the dictatorial period, and the recent process of restoring democracy and stimulating the economy, transformed the popular sphere. Apparently, the popular economy is now asserting itself and is being recognized as an active economic subject. The consolidated popular economy can no longer be reduced to a bunch of 'survival strategies', and has evolved into a set of truly stable and ultimately employment- and revenue-generating economic organizations. In Santiago, nearly 20 per cent (see PET 1991) of the workforce (and 25 per cent in the poor quarters, that is, more than one-third of jobs) is in the popular economy. While a number of survival-oriented units have disappeared, other units are consolidating their position or even being formed. There is also a slow emergence of structure in the popular economy movement with the birth of second-level organizations. This structuring process is inseparable from the relationships between the units of the popular economy and a network of backing institutions.

2.2 In the North: the evolution of the social economy

In industrialized countries, the concept of the informal economy covers various components, with diverging criteria across authors. For some, the distinctive criterion is first and foremost that of the lack of recording in official statistics (underground economy) (Ginsburgh and Pestieau 1987). In that case, the informal economy includes such disparate activities as domestic labour, voluntary work and the black

market. For others, the concept pinpoints a range of nonremunerated productive activities such as domestic labour, voluntary work and barter in services between close relatives and neighbours (Presvelou 1994). For others still, the informal economy designates the black market and, more generally, all forms of irregular employment (Mingione 1990). Beyond these definitional differences, what appears to be the common ground of these analyses is the context in which they are located, namely, the crisis over modes of regulation. These various forms of informal economy arise in the era of 'flexible specialization' of modes of labour organization, of development of the service sector (increasing demand for services from both households and firms) and of the crisis in the welfare state (Mingione 1990). We believe it would be better to abandon the term 'informal economy' and to use more precisely circumscribed expressions in order to analyse the various segments which this concept covers and which run the risk of being kept together in a vague and confusing bundle, yielding reductionist judgements about the polymorphic realities which the concept of 'informal economy' in fact hides.

Here we have chosen to dwell on the evolution of those modes of socio-economic organization which make up the concept of the 'social economy'. These are organizations which belong neither to the sphere of capitalist firms nor to that of the public economy, and which cannot be counted as domestic activities either. Usually, the concept is considered to cover mutual benefit societies, cooperatives and nonprofit organizations. Although the term is often discussed and yields different terminologies across countries (such as 'third sector' or 'voluntary sector'), all the analyses have in common the acknowledgement of a dynamics which is different within these socio-economic organizations compared with capitalist or state enterprises (Defourny 1992a).

The social economy has its roots in workers' associationism, which emerged in the 19th century with the support of various traditions (socialist, Christian, liberal, etc.) by Owen, Saint-Simon, Fourier, Proudhon and Buchez, among others (Gueslin 1987). This associationist impulse arose in a context of industrialization, proletarianization and pauperization where the workers, peasants and craftsmen sought to satisfy new needs. These associations were multifunctional: their aim was not only to create a microsocial space of solidarity but also to step in as actors in the area of economic organization, both at the level of production and at the level of distribution. Workers' associations were able to make some use of traditional types of solidarity (families, corporations), but they also

shifted away from them in that they were grounded in principles of liberty and equality between members, who adhered on a voluntary basis. Thus the associations emerged in a public space (Laville 1994). There were mutual benefit societies which not only ensured a kind of social protection (health care, pensions) but also encouraged socialization between their members, following the rhythm of events of daily life.⁵ Some became loci of resistance and protest activities against social order; the mutual benefit societies turned out to be the starting point of many workers' struggles (Gueslin 1987).

From the end of the 19th century, this budding social economy was deeply influenced by the evolution of the workers' movement. In order to solve 'the social question', the actors turned to the state and the elaboration of a powerful social legislation. This meant the end of the multifunctionality (economic, social, political, etc.) of the workers' associations. They divided into separate structures increasingly distant from one another. The mutual benefit societies specialized in social protection; the cooperatives confined their activities to consumption, the trade unions to the 'workers' struggle' (Peemans-Poullet 1993). This specialization left a deep mark on the social economy, which gradually abandoned the political terrain and lost its vocation of questioning the structures of the existing mode of socio-economic organization. This materialized in a dissociation between the economic (the sphere of the market) and the social (the sphere of the state), to the detriment of the social economy's identity (Laville 1994).

In Belgium, the evolution of the cooperative sector in the first half of the 20th century illustrates this tendency. The cooperative production sector was almost extinct. The development of consumption, savings and credit cooperatives showed evidence of an increasing integration into the market sphere, via the separation of commercial and social functions and via centralization (Ansion and Martou 1988). The cooperatives were thus trivialized and became a component of the market (for those who managed to survive, since the priority given to economics led to the death of many cooperatives). Thanks to a recognition of their activities, the mutual benefit societies became the organs through which the social protection mechanisms instituted by the social legislation were implemented (especially with the creation of social security in 1944). The notion of solidarity evolved from a horizontal dimension (of a relational type) into a more vertical

5 In 1851, there were 50,000 workers grouped into 200 mutual benefit societies in Belgium (Ansion and Martou 1988).

one (in which the state appeared as the ultimate organizer of solidarity). The social economy's organizations were gradually made to fit into the market-state synergy built up during the '*trente glorieuses*' and sustained by the picture of a market which ensures the production of wealth and a protecting state which evolves into a welfare state. The economy thus began to be divided into a market sphere and a state sphere. During the 20th century, some branches of the social economy (mutual benefit societies and cooperatives, particularly in banking and insurance) continued their development within this stereotype, at the cost of a weakening of their associative essence.

In Belgium, the concept of social economy re-emerged in the 1980s thanks, among other things, to the institution of the Conseil Wallon de l'Economie Sociale (Defourny 1992b). Although the social economy endured all through the traditional cooperative and mutualist movements of the 20th century, the resurgence of interest in the social economy came via the rise of what has become known as the 'new social economy'. First, this new social economy took the form of small workers' cooperatives, whose aim in the context of the economic crisis was to create their own sources of employment in a self-management perspective⁶ (Defourny 1988). Second, the scope of the social economy was deeply marked by a modification of the associative field (nonprofit organizations). The associative fabric was transformed by the proliferation of local initiatives aiming to fulfil unsatisfied needs. These associations produce goods and services in the area of community services (care of persons, environmental protection, etc.).⁷ According to some analysts (Laville 1994), these organizations are specific in that they develop a plural logic combining voluntary dimensions (importance of networks of social links, use of voluntary help, etc.), market dimensions (sale of goods and services on the market) and nonmarket ones (subsidies received from the public authority). These organizations are based on a 'reciprocity impetus' – economic activity is rooted in a network of social links – which maintains itself through the implementation of the economic activity. Thus the goods and services circulated by these organizations

6 In the past 15 years, from 200 to 300 cooperatives of less than 20 workers were created (Defourny 1992b).

7 There are in Belgium an estimated 70,000 associations, employing more than 200,000, in addition to the bulk of voluntary help (Defourny 1992b). Concerning the associations of reinsertion through the economic, there were, in 1994, more than 60 in the French speaking part of Belgium, with 2,000 young beneficiaries each year.

also provide links between persons. These associations expand in public community spaces. Such a territorial anchoring facilitates interactions between various actors: workers, users, local public officers, and so on.

As explained by Favreau (1994), these associations might be a way 'to generate previously unheard-of solutions to the crisis of employment and the welfare state, by occupying an intermediary space located at the intersection of the relationship between the state and civil society, the relation between local communities and development, and the relationship between the economical and the social'. The development of these associations challenges the market-state synergy and thus vindicates the separation of the economic and the social (Laville 1994). They offer a new way not only in the context of economic crisis (unemployment and the state's financial difficulties), but also in a more general context of crisis in the mode of regulation of society (role of the state, recognition of forms of work other than classical waged labour, links between the economic and the social, etc.).

2.3 On the similarity of evolutions

While the institutional contexts are very different, it is striking to note the similarities in the evolution of the popular economy phenomena in the South (in particular in Chile) and the social economy in the North (in particular in Belgium). There are three main stages in this development.

A first stage is characterized by the associative and multifunctional character of the initiatives rooted in social networks. In the North, this associative movement was marked more by its working-class character, since it was connected with the proletarianization of the working world (even though craftsmen were also involved in it). In the South, the movement developed rather in the world of craftsmen, a local fabric which carried a social productive identity. But both belonged to two spheres: as initiators of a specific mode of socio-economic organization, they belonged to the economic sphere, and as a movement of resistance against the existing development model, they belonged to the political sphere.

In a second stage, these features grew apart, and the movements were integrated into a modernization project which favoured the market-state synergy. In the South, the associative energy of the popular economy waned and became focused on the organization of a series of militant-type initiatives vis-à-vis the state (educational and

health networks, housing policy, etc.); the popular economy became part of the market sphere and was transformed into a 'hidden link' in the productive fabric. In the North, the social economy was trivialized as the resistance function (attributed to the union movements) and the economic character was split apart; the cooperatives turned into a subset of the market economy and the mutual benefit societies became an instrument of state-organized social security systems.

Finally, a third stage emerged with the general crisis of the mode of regulation of the market–state synergy (both in the North and in the South). In the South, the popular economy turns out to be not only a means of survival in the face of economic adversity, but also a means of political, social and cultural resistance, particularly via a rekindling of the associative flame. The popular economy seeks to assert itself as a promoter of development with its own specific mode of socio-economic organization. In the North, the burgeoning of nonprofit organizations producing goods and services at the community level – rooted in a social link and based on a plural logic (mixture of voluntary, market and nonmarket resources) – appears as a particular response to the crisis in employment and the welfare state. These changes are a challenge to the existing mode of regulation, and they open up new horizons for the relationship between the economic and the social.

3 The underlying epistemological issues

The informal economy has been abundantly analysed and has become a central subject in development policies. However, it has remained confined to a residual role because of the narrowness of the approach usually adopted in these analyses. Therefore, we feel it is important to acknowledge that these modes of socio-economic organization have a privileged role to play in the development of society both in the North and in the South.

3.1 The limitations of traditional analyses of the informal sector in the South

Let us first discuss the analyses of the informal sector in the cities of the Third World. There are two important streams of thought: the analyses inspired by neoclassical theory and the structuralist current.

The *orthodox approaches* draw on neoclassical theory. It is, however, necessary to distinguish between an 'ideological' vision, the

'neoliberal' project, which views the 'informal sector' as the 'ideal' realization of perfect competition, and the analyses inspired by classical dualistic development models. In the eyes of the neoliberal current (De Soto 1987), the urban 'informal sector' is the locus of the full deployment of perfect competition, which is impaired in the 'modern sector' by various state-induced barriers: protectionism, legal measures, excessive bureaucracy, wage rigidity, and so on. These measures maintain barriers to entry which keep the market from operating in a competitive fashion. In order to circumvent these barriers, the spirit of entrepreneurship, which is considered universal, is viewed as redeploying itself at the fringe of these legal regulations. The popular economy is, in this view, a form of 'barefoot capitalism'. Other analysts rather view the emergence of the 'informal sector' as a new way of thinking about the heterogeneity of the structures of developed economies. These authors suggest multicriterion definitions.⁸ These neoclassically inspired models do not assume any subordination of the 'informal sector' to the 'modern sector'. Rather, both sectors compete in markets (Nihan 1980, Lachaud 1990, Charmes 1990).

In contrast, the *structuralist current* (which is developing mainly in Latin America) recasts the problem of the 'informal sector' within a context of structural heterogeneity, that is, of an interdependent coexistence of technical processes and social relations corresponding to different stages of development. At the heart of structuralist thought lies the need for state policies in that context, in order to facilitate the emergence of a 'modern' sector which would supply technical progress and industrialization by mobilizing the potentials and the resources of traditional society (Prebisch 1984). Thus, the 'informal sector' is identified with the least productive segment of the labour market and with the lowest wages, paid to a labour force which is in excess supply and is unable to integrate with the modern sector, or has been ejected from it (Mezzera 1984). In this perspective, the informal sector, which is made up of 'dropouts', is bound to regress under the pressure of global economic growth and the growing absorption of the labour force by the modern sector (Tokman 1990). It might be possible to 'modernize' the upper fringe of the 'informal sector'

8 The 'informal sector' is characterized by the following elements: few barriers to entry, low capital-labour ratio, elementary production techniques, low level of (formal) qualification of workers, low accumulation capacity, family ownership, nonwage social relationships, operation at the fringe of legality, little protection of work, etc.

by support policies directed at them, and some may be able to 'make the jump' to integrate technical progress. In this perspective, it is also important to encourage the sector to move towards legality and to comply with labour protection measures. The informal sector, being a refuge for excess labour, is viewed as a regulator of crises specific to developing societies.

Within this structuralist stream, there are two main approaches. According to the marginalist view, on the one hand, the informal sector develops into a 'subsistence economy' which does not participate in the global accumulation process (Urmeneta 1988). On the other hand, the functionalist view (Lebrun and Gerry 1975, Moser 1978) acknowledges the links between the two sectors, but only in terms of functionality from the point of view of capitalist accumulation: since the informal sector is technologically inferior and is subordinated to large capital, its excess is transferred to the formal sector. This is designated as the insertion of informal units into the chain of production and commercialization, particularly via subcontracting and the production of cheap consumption goods. According to the functionalists, the 'informal sector' thus constitutes one modality of the capitalist sector's functioning, linked to the new forms of deregulated accumulation whose strategies rest on both the 'formal' and the 'informal'.

Both the orthodox and the structuralist analyses rest on a certain conception of development viewed as a specific process of modernization (even though means may vary), with systematic reference to the industrialization process followed by developed countries. Development here is tantamount to industrial accumulation (Peemans 1987). From that perspective, everything that lies outside the realm of modern industry is judged by its contribution to industrial accumulation. This objective serves as the measuring rod for the evaluation of social, economic and cultural structures which obey a pattern different from that of modern industry. These structures are either harmful (irrational from the economist's viewpoint) or backward, and at best they play a passive role, as in the dualist models (Fei and Ranis 1964), or are possibly viewed as transitory (Hugon 1990) on the way to 'true development'. The very concept of the 'informal sector' is underpinned by an implicit presupposition of 'irrationality', of 'absence of structure'. Thus, the 'informal sector' is bound to disappear or to be 'normalized' or 'formalized' with a view to accumulation.

However, the reassessment of Western development has challenged this linear view of development where the incumbent mode of

regulation shows its limitations. In particular, what is put forward is the efficiency of forms of production and modes of regulation which offer alternatives to mass production and are embedded in dense social networks in some regions (Piore and Sabel 1984, Best 1990). The reading of the so-called informal sector is, in our eyes, one possible avenue for a re-evaluation of this monolithic conception of development and for a reassessment of the articulations between the various forms of socio-economic organization.

3.2 The limitations of traditional analyses of the associative world in the North

The interest of economists (at least in Europe) in the nonprofit organization world is recent (Defourny 1992c). This growing interest can be explained by two simultaneous factors which have emerged in a context of a crisis over the mode of regulation corresponding to the 'market-state synergy'. For one thing, in a context of a crisis over public finance and over state legitimacy, attention has been focused on the weight, the role and the efficiency of some sectors not involved in the market logic (in particular education and health). Furthermore, the associative field (and in particular small and medium-sized nonprofit organizations) has undergone profound changes through a growing involvement in the production of goods and services, and this has drawn the attention of economists to the role of these associations in the production of wealth. These organizations were heretofore neglected because of the (false) presupposition that only the market produces wealth.⁹

However, the study of these modes of organization is strongly subordinated to the incumbent mode of regulation, namely the market-state synergy. As a result, in Belgium all these organizations have been classified under the term 'nonmarket sector', as opposed to the 'market' sector (Meunier 1992). The importance of this denomination is that it emphasizes the role of the state in this mode of organization (particularly as regards the sources of financing). Nevertheless, this 'market-nonmarket' dichotomy is ambiguous and possesses some strong limitations (Defourny 1992c). First, it is implicitly assumed that the sole regulatory principles are the market

9 The role played by public authorities in the allocation of goods and services has been acknowledged by economists for a long time (see Musgrave 1959), whereas the work analysing the role of these nonprofit organizations is much more recent.

and the state, whereas it is now recognized that one specificity of associative dynamics is that they call on other principles (e.g. voluntary work, which obeys neither the market nor the state logic). Second, many so-called 'nonmarket' organizations work with the market (among other things for the sale of goods and services). Finally, just as the analysis of the 'informal sector' of southern countries is subordinated to the conceptual framework of the 'formal' sector, numerous studies of the 'nonmarket' reality are limited by their reference to the market sector (e.g., the authors often give priority to studies in terms of profitability without investigating the specificities of this notion within the 'nonmarket' logic).

Other approaches have focused more narrowly on the specificity of nonprofit organizations. The analysis of associations as components of the social economy (Defourny and Monzon 1992) is specific in that it emphasizes the features shared by cooperatives, mutual benefit societies and associations, which leads to the assumption that there exists a set of socio-economic organizations whose logic flows neither from the state nor from the capitalist firm. In the Anglo-Saxon world, there is a growing literature on nonprofit organizations (NPOs) (see Powell 1987, Weisbrod 1988, Anheier and Seibel 1990), a concept close to that of associations, which also relies on the assumption of a third, nonmonetary type of organization alongside firms and the state. This literature contains roughly two kinds of theories (Hansmann 1987): on the one hand, those which attempt to explain the existence of NPOs and, on the other, those which investigate their behaviour and their performance. The study of the *raison d'être* of NPOs has led to an investigation either of the origin of the demand for them, with insistence on market failures and/or on state failures, or of the emergence of the supply and the motivations of producers (James 1990, Ben-Ner and Van Hoomissen 1991).

Contrary to what we saw to be the case for the 'market/nonmarket' approach, these analyses in terms of social economy and NPOs acknowledge the plurality of modes of socio-economic organization. This recognition of a 'plural' economy seems to us to be a fruitful avenue to challenge the existing mode of regulation. Let us now move in that direction.

3.3 An epistemological choice: the tripolar organization of economic activity

Many authors have already drawn attention to the fact that there are different answers to the economic problem and different modes of

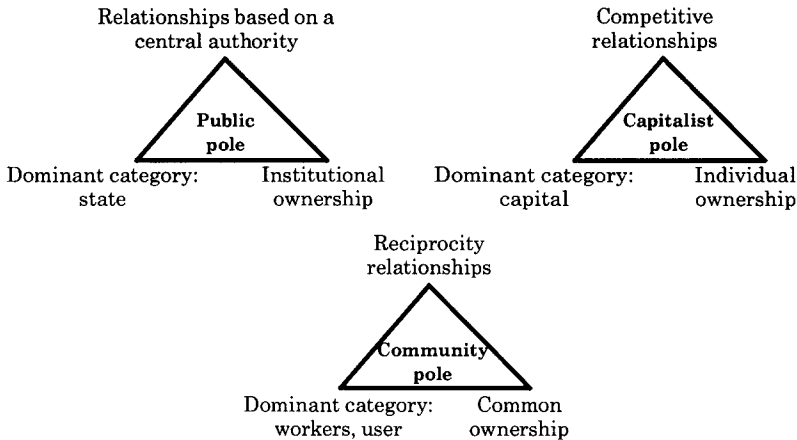


Figure 1—The three poles of economic organization

organization (Perroux 1960, Polanyi 1983). All these analyses suggest that economic organization should be viewed as structured on three poles. Several criteria have been offered as means to differentiate these poles conceptually:

- (i) a typology of firms on the basis of the dominant category – that is, the group which has the initiative of the enterprise and which has the power to decide (Razeto 1988, Gui 1991) – and on the basis of the forms of ownership;
- (ii) a typology of economic relations (both within the firm and outside) – relations of exchange, but also of redistribution, imposition and reciprocity.

On the basis of these criteria, we will distinguish between the three following poles: the capitalist pole, the state pole and the 'community' pole (Figure 1) (see Nyssens 1994). Although there is no mechanical correspondence between these criteria, it is possible to establish connections because there are *de facto* organic links between the dominant category, the form of ownership and the economic relations.

The capitalist pole is made up of the firms which are organized by capital (and hence oriented towards capitalist-type accumulation), which function on the basis of competitive relations (based on the pursuit of personal interests) and which develop forms of individual ownership. The public pole, organized by the state, functions through relations requiring a central authority and develops forms of

institutional ownership. The community pole is the one in which firms are organized by human factors (the labour factor or the users) and adopt forms of common ownership. This pole develops mainly reciprocity relationships as goods and services circulated by these organizations fulfil a role of serving the links between persons. Thanks to this grid of analysis, we can grasp modes of socio-economic organization whose logic is hybrid.

Such a conceptual grid and such an acknowledgement of a plural economy allows us to approach both the popular economy and the associative sector from a fresh perspective, and to render coherent the various features of their mode of organization.

Labour is the dominant category in the firms of the popular economy. Reciprocity relations are dominant. There is essentially a mutual recognition due to a common past, of a daily life which evolves within the popular quarters, and of a *poblador* identity. Very often, the group's exists before the economic activity (family-run firms, PEOs). Thus, one witnesses the development of a network logic, both formal and informal, particularly between the PEOs and the *micro-empresas*. Many firms develop forms of common ownership. In that sense, the identity of the popular economy is in some respects (type of dominant category, type of economic relations, type of property relations) close to the community pole. However, the popular economy is also closely integrated into a market logic. While some ownership structures are communal, others are individual. Some units operate in a very isolated and individual fashion. Thus the logic of the popular economy is fundamentally hybrid, but this grid of analysis makes it possible to break its subordination vis-à-vis the formal sector and to shed light on a specific mode of socio-economic organization.

Regarding the organization of associations, we have already emphasized that their specificity lies in a mixture of different resources: market, nonmarket and voluntary. The organizational dynamics are guided by a 'reciprocity impetus', particularly via the interaction of different actors rooted in social networks (workers, users, local public partners, etc.). Thus these associations obey an intrinsically plural logic. While rooted in the community pole, they also rely on the market and on state intervention.

From this short description, it is possible to show the importance of these different principles (community, market, state) within these organizations themselves (Evers 1995).

4 The political issues

These epistemological considerations make it possible to shed new light on the political issues underlying the popular economy. The popular economy in the South and the NPOs in the North evolve in very different contexts, but our aim here is to emphasize the common challenges they face.

4.1 Policies stuck in the 'market-state' dichotomy

The policies currently implemented concerning both the popular economy and the associations are marked by the narrow framework of the 'market-state' dichotomy.

Regarding the popular economy, the traditional debate on development is stuck between two positions: to give a more important role to the state or to the private, for-profit sector as a motor of development. Not only do the models of industrialization opt for a particular kind of development objective (linked to modernization), they also favour the role of certain actors: the entrepreneurs of large capitalist firms and the state. These appear as the 'motors' of a growth that is supposed to 'trickle down' gradually to the other sectors of society. The popular sectors are always potential beneficiaries of development but never its protagonists. Within this framework, the policies aimed at the popular economy are conceived as transient and precarious means to fight exclusion and hence remain confined to the realm of social policy.

Regarding the policies for NPOs in the North, these are locked into the narrow framework of unemployment-reduction programmes. Thus the social utility of NPOs is supposedly limited to the number of unemployed who reintegrate into the labour market. This means a move towards 'a social utility sector in which the state becomes an instrument to manage the labor of the excluded'¹⁰ (Laville 1994). This way of thinking neglects the specificity of these initiatives and their mixed location between a community logic, a market logic and a state logic, which makes them radically different from a purely centralized, state-managed logic. It also neglects the fact that the contribution of these associations is not limited to employment creation. They produce goods and services (particularly in the area of personal

10 In Belgium, the development of the ALE (agences locales pour l'emploi) is representative of this trend.

services) which are impossible to dissociate from broader social objectives (quasi-public services).

If policies are to take a different orientation, it is necessary to rehabilitate the plurality of modes of socio-economic organization.

4.2 On the role of the state

The development of both the popular economy and the NPOs raises questions concerning the role of the state. Just because the dynamics of these organizations is distinct from a state-oriented centralization and their foundational impetus is of a 'reciprocal' nature, does not imply that the state has no role to play whatsoever. The popular economy which is developing in the large cities of the South is seeking recognition of its socio-economic role by, among others, the public authorities. It could look into the future with more confidence if there were an appropriate legal framework. The popular economy has suffered many kinds of exclusion and is therefore still precarious in many respects. Its consolidation will require a transfer of resources, especially to implement a support system. As for the NPOs movement in the North, to last it also needs the support of the state. The idea is not to remodel the internal dynamics of the public service, but rather to go 'from a protecting state to a partner-state' in the setting up of certain services (Laville 1994). This is so, in particular, in the area of modes of financing which need to be implemented in order to ensure solvency and access for all categories of the population, and whose justification lies in the fact that these activities have strong externalities (quasi-public goods). This conception of a 'partner state' should also guide reflection on its role in structures which would favour the development of local initiatives mixing market, nonmarket and nonmonetary resources.

4.3 On links with the market

Both the popular economy and the associations have a large market component.

How does the popular economy fit into the market? There is clearly a local market with its own dynamics. Certain segments of the popular economy entertain relations with the modern sector – for some it is a relation of more or less strong subordination (commercialization of products from the capitalist sector, subcontracting), while for others it is a relation of competition (production workshops), and yet other segments are located in 'niches' where the formal sector does not

operate. To differentiate the popular economy from the modern sector, it is important to emphasize the embeddedness of these economic activities within the social fabric of the popular quarters. The operation of the popular economy is organically linked to this environment. Can it survive on the market alongside capitalist firms? It is of course impossible to give a definite answer to this question. However, there is some potential for this, if the emergence and development of the popular economy, some of whose segments succeed in becoming stable organizations, is any indication. What confirms this potential is the fact that the popular organizations have proved very sturdy in the face of a hostile environment (systematic social exclusion of the popular world, competitive markets, lack of access to state social benefits, etc.) and in the face of strong resource limitations (especially in terms of financial and material means). The popular *micro-empresas* are able to satisfy the basic needs of most of their members while at the same time pursuing nonmonetary aspirations: autonomy, intensification of social links, personal growth, mobilizing work competence, and so on (Larraechea 1994). This type of local development, which relies on the deployment of local resources, can be likened to the experiments conducted in industrial districts such as those of north-east Italy, and whose success flows from the conjunction of local identity and industrial dynamism (Best 1990, Ganne 1991).

Regarding the associations, we have already highlighted the studies on NPOs which emphasize the role played by these organizations in a context of market and state failure and, specifically, in the production of services with 'high relational content'. Some theories insist on the fact that such organizations are able to coexist with capitalist firms because they are better able to overcome informational asymmetries (James 1990) via the confidence attached to their nonprofit structure. Others emphasize the comparative advantages connected with the use of nonmonetary resources (voluntary work, etc.) (James 1990, Laville 1992). However, their development alongside capitalist firms has also to be explained through political choices. Thanks to state subsidies, NPOs are involved in a policy of distribution of quasi-public goods (Badelt 1990).

4.4 On developing an economy of solidarity

This leads us to the underlying 'political project' needed to ensure a perpetuation of these modes of socio-economic organization. We do not believe that evolution is inescapable and mechanical. The choice of the type of institution and of the modes of regulation lies with politics, 'the

political being that through which a society reflects on itself and asserts itself in its historical and spatio-temporal uniqueness' (Caillé 1993).

The project of developing organizations in 'an economy of solidarity' rests on a desire to support the emergence of modes of socio-economic organization which rely on the complementarity of the community, capitalist and public poles. These organizations emerge from the reciprocitary sphere and develop within local public spaces, and draw on the principles of exchange and redistribution. The projects of an economy of solidarity have a tendency to reunite that which has long been separated and to question some presuppositions of the market-state synergy (Laville 1994): the separation between the economic and the social, the sharp dividing line between paid work and leisure, the state's monopoly on solidarity, the market-state dichotomy, and so on. The project of an economy of solidarity does not pretend to provide a magical solution to the crisis of the mode of regulation, but it offers a way to develop modes of socio-economic organization which have been excluded from the classical construction of the relationship between the market and the state.

In the South, the popular economy will be able to assert itself as an actor alongside the other forms of socio-economic organization only if it is recognized by the political class. This economy of solidarity project aims at a better integration of all socio-economic actors by fostering a balance between the various poles of development. The idea is to give a new impulse to help sectors which are still considered marginal incorporate themselves as active agents of development, and to give the popular economy a fundamental place as a subject of development. By taking into account its roots in reciprocity in the popular quarters, policy should aim at consolidating the popular economy's units and to facilitate their more balanced integration in the market.

Regarding the development of community services through NPOs in the North, the project of an economy of solidarity requires a significant reframing of public policies. What is needed is a shift from a view of the role of associations solely within the restricted framework of unemployment reduction to a greater attention to the multidimensional character of objectives: employment creation, of course, but also the satisfaction of needs with a high content in positive externalities, the creation of socialization dynamics, and so on. The economy of solidarity projects rest on a plural logic that develops in a local public space where supply and demand are constructed jointly (Ben-Ner and Van Hoomissen 1991, Laville 1994). It is important to recognize the specificity of this mode of socio-economic organization, which fits badly into the market-state dichotomy.

5 Conclusions

Both the popular economy and the 'new social economy' evolve in a context of a crisis over the mode of regulation offered by the market-state synergy. This mode of development had completely blocked out the modes of socio-economic organization regulated by other principles. The market and the state were connected within a binary pair. With this crisis, organizations which take root in social networks appear not only as sources of employment creation, but also as sources of social cohesion. The popular economy and the social economy direct us beyond the narrow framework of the market-nonmarket dichotomy and towards the recognition of the inherent plurality of modes of socio-economic organization. These movements and the analyses which they imply lead to a questioning of the traditional conceptual frameworks, and in particular those of economists.

For those who are reluctant to acknowledge the existence of modes of normative functioning other than the market or the state, the 'informal sector' is either an inexplicable enigma or a negative reality: it appears as that which is not yet a formal market, and it reduces to a space which lies 'outside state law'. In contrast, by discovering its interactive dynamics and its extraordinary ability to combine logics, we can come to see it as an original actor in development. In fact, by the very way in which they function, these organizations represent an original way of combining the economic and the social and of fighting the dualization of society. In order to last, they need institutional recognition together with respect for their specificities. This recognition requires a profound revision of the public policies directed at them and, more broadly, of the whole traditional articulation of market and state. This is the price to pay if these seeds of an economy of solidarity are to grow and to offer original articulations between the economic and the social.

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Economie populaire au Sud, Economie sociale au Nord: Signes d'une économie solidaire en émergence?

L'objet de cet article est de comparer les réalités (de certaines composantes) du secteur dit informel dans les pays du Nord et dans les pays du Sud. Nous mettrons en parallèle les mouvements d'économie populaire au Sud – plus particulièrement à Santiago du Chili – et d'économie sociale au Nord en prenant comme cas illustratif celui de la Belgique. Au-delà de contextes institutionnels très différents, nous voulons mettre en évidence les similarités des évolutions conditionnées par les modes de régulation mis en place. Ces formes d'organisation socio-économiques nécessitent de nouvelles régulations. En effet, les analyses et les politiques traditionnelles ne prennent pas suffisamment en compte la spécificité de ces activités socio-économiques. Tant l'économie populaire qui se développe dans les métropoles des pays du Tiers-Monde que les associations qui émergent au sein des réalités socio-économiques du Nord interpellent les modes de régulation dominants, en particulier la synergie Etat-marché.

Après une analyse historique de l'émergence et de l'évolution de l'économie populaire au Sud et de l'économie sociale au Nord (partie 1), nous aborderons les défis d'ordre épistémologique dans notre deuxième partie. Tant l'économie populaire qui se développe dans les métropoles des pays du Tiers-Monde que les associations qui émergent au sein des réalités socio-économiques du Nord sont à la source d'une abondante littérature qui interroge les cadres théoriques, en particulier ceux de l'économiste. Introduisant des formes spécifiques d'organisation socio-économique, ces phénomènes interpellent du même coup les modes de régulation dominants, en particulier le mode de construction du rapport Etat/marché propre aux modèles modernes de développement.

Enfin, dans une troisième partie, nous dirons quelques mots des enjeux politiques d'une telle lecture. Le dilemme marchand/non-marchand, dans lequel s'enferment encore les modèles de régulation, nous semble témoigner d'une cécité à l'égard du pluralisme des modes d'organisation qui trament la vie socio-économique. A l'encontre de ce schéma binaire, nous aimerions montrer la fécondité d'une approche de l'économie qui prenne en compte l'hybridation de principes. Cette combinatoire n'exclut ni le marché, ni l'Etat, mais ne s'y réduit pas. Il y a là, me semble-t-il, l'esquisse d'un nouveau mode de régulation économique, qui va certes à contre-courant du «tout au marché» contemporain, mais qui ancre néanmoins sa promesse dans la réalité déjà effective des pratiques économiques.

“Economía popular” im Süden, Dritter Sektor im Norden: Sind dies Zeichen einer sich entwickelnden Solidarwirtschaft?

Ziel dieses Beitrags ist es, die Realität (oder zumindest die einiger Komponenten) des sogenannten informellen Sektors im Norden und im Süden miteinander zu vergleichen. Wir werden eine Parallele ziehen zwischen den Bewegungen der “Economía popular” im Süden – präziser: in Santiago de Chile – und der Sozialwirtschaft (dem Dritten Sektor) im Norden, wobei Belgien zur Illustration herangezogen wird. Obwohl die institutionellen Zusammenhänge signifikant variieren, besteht unser Ziel darin, die Ähnlichkeiten der Entwicklung hervorzuheben, die durch einander entsprechende Formen der Regulierung induziert werden. Diese Formen sozio-ökonomischer Organisationen erfordern neue Arten der Regulierung. Der Grund hierfür ist, daß traditionelle Analysen und Politiken der Spezifität dieser Art sozio-ökonomischer Aktivität unzureichend Rechnung tragen. Sowohl die “Economía popular”, die sich in den großen Städten der Länder der Dritten Welt entwickelt, als auch die Nonprofit-Organisationen, die sich innerhalb der sozio-ökonomischen Realitäten

des Nordens herausbilden, stellen eine Herausforderung an die vorherrschenden Formen der Regulierung und insbesondere an die "state market-synergy" dar.

In Teil I präsentieren wir eine historische Analyse des Entstehens und der Entwicklung der *Economía popular* im Süden sowie der Sozialwirtschaft im Norden. Anschließend erörtern wir in Teil II die erkenntnistheoretischen Herausforderungen. Sowohl die "*Economía popular*", die sich in den großen Städten der Dritten Welt entwickelt hat, als auch die Nonprofit-Organisationen, die sich innerhalb der sozio-ökonomischen Realitäten des Nordens herausbilden, waren Anlaß für eine umfangreiche Literatur, die das theoretische Gerüst, und insbesondere das der Ökonomen, in Frage stellt. Da sie spezifische Formen sozio-ökonomischer Organisation einführen, bilden diese Phänomene auch eine Herausforderung für die vorherrschenden Formen der Regulierung und insbesondere für die Art und Weise, in der moderne Entwicklungsmodelle die Staat/Markt-Beziehung erfassen.

Schließlich sagen wir in Teil III etwas zu den politischen Fragen, die durch diese Art des Verständnisses der Fakten aufgeworfen werden. Die Regulierungsformen bleiben in dem Markt-/Nicht-Markt-Dilemma verhaftet, und dies scheint uns ein Zeichen einer bestimmten "Blindheit" gegenüber der Pluralität von Organisationsformen zu sein, die im sozio-ökonomischen Leben miteinander verstrickt sind. Wir möchten gern dieses binäre Bild überwinden und zeigen, wie fruchtbar ein ökonomischer Ansatz sein kann, der die Mischung von Prinzipien einbezieht. Eine solche Kombinatorik schließt weder den Markt noch den Staat aus, aber sie reduziert nicht allein auf Markt und Staat. Dies, so scheint mir, macht die Konturen einer neuen Form wirtschaftlicher Regulierung deutlich, und zwar einer, die natürlich gegenwärtig (ganz den Markt) herausfordert, aber deren Potential nichtsdestoweniger in bereits bestehenden ökonomischen Praktiken wurzelt.

Economía popular en el Sur, economía social en el Norte. ¿Signos de una economía solidaria emergente?

El objeto de este artículo es comparar las realidades (ciertos componentes) del sector denominado informal en los países del Norte y en los países del Sur. Se ponen en paralelo los movimientos de economía popular en el Sur – particularmente en Santiago de Chile – y los de economía social en el Norte, tomando como caso ilustrativo el de Bélgica. Más allá de los muy diferentes contextos institucionales, queremos poner en evidencia las similitudes de las evoluciones condicionadas por los modos de regulación llevados a cabo. Estas formas de organización socioeconómicas necesitan

nuevas regulaciones. En efecto, los análisis y las políticas tradicionales no toman en cuenta suficientemente la especificidad de estas actividades socioeconómicas. Tanto la economía popular que se desarrolla en las metrópolis de los países del Tercer Mundo como las asociaciones que emergen en el seno de las realidades socioeconómicas del Norte interpelan los modos de regulación dominantes, particularmente la sinergia Estado-mercado.

Después de un análisis histórico de la emergencia y evolución de la economía popular en el Sur y de la economía social en el Norte, abordamos los desafíos de orden epistemológico en la segunda parte. Tanto la economía popular que se desarrolla en las metrópolis de los países del Tercer Mundo como las asociaciones que emergen en el seno de realidades socioeconómicas del Norte son origen de una abundante literatura que interroga los planteamientos teóricos, en particular los económicos. Introduciendo formas específicas de organización socioeconómica, estos fenómenos interpelan al mismo tiempo los modos de regulación dominantes, en particular el modo de construcción de la relación Estado-mercado propio de los modernos modelos de desarrollo.

Por último, en una tercera parte, se dicen algunas palabras de los desafíos políticos de tal lectura. El dilema mercado – no mercado, en el que se encierran todavía los modelos de regulación, parece atestiguar ceguera respecto al pluralismo de los modos de organización que traman la vida socioeconómica. Contrariamente a ese esquema binario, quisieramos mostrar la fecundidad de un enfoque de la economía que toma en consideración la hibridación de principios. Esta combinatoria no excluye ni al mercado ni al Estado, pero no se reduce a ello. Hay ahí, en nuestra opinión, el esbozo de un nuevo modo de regulación económica, que va por supuesto a contra corriente del “todo al mercado” contemporáneo, pero que ancia sin embargo su promesa en la realidad ya efectiva de las prácticas económicas.