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SOLIDARISCHE ÖKONOMIE ZWISCHEN MARKT UND STAAT

Gesellschaftsveränderung oder Selbsthilfe?

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Introduction: Solidarity Economics – emancipatory social change or self-help?

Crisis-prone economic development, which we can understand with Mandel (1980) as following long waves of alternating periods of high and low growth, seems to correlate with a similar cycle of declining and growing interest in alternative economics. As reflected by a growing number of publications (Singer 2002; Wallerstein 2002; Albert 2003; Altvater/Sekler 2006; Gibson-Graham 2006; Santos 2006; Vilmar 2008) and activist conferences (Eid 2003; Embshoff/Giegold 2008), we can observe that economic crises encourage debates about alternative forms of organizing economies and societies. Just as the capitalist system of resource allocation is displaying dysfunctional effects and people are struggling for their jobs and economic survival, we witness a growing interest in heterodox economics and alternative forms of organizing economic activity. In this context, one important demand of economically underprivileged parts of society, whose basic needs cannot be satisfied in the conventional economy any more, is the radical re-organization of the economy. This has recently been articulated for example in demands for the re-regulation of financial markets and proper social policies that are able to cushion the social effects of the current economic crisis. By those means, amongst others, the dictate of capital shall give way to a bigger influence of labour and society in general in the distribution of economic outputs.

A large number of current debates about heterodox and alternative approaches to economics are discussed under the denomination 'Solidarity Economics' (SE), which can also be found in a variety of contexts that are closely linked to development politics. Amongst the variety of contents discussed during the last meetings of the World Social Forum (WSF), SE is taking a more and more prominent place

(see www.forumsocialmundial.org.br). The close link to social movements and various social forums has already shown political consequences, as in the example of the establishment of the Brazilian State Secretary for Solidarity Economy. The debate on SE is, however, even more intense in peripheral countries, which in turn results in a prominent place within development discourses. Numerous examples in southern countries as well as in Europe show that it is possible to actually realize concepts of alternative production and economy on different scales (Horvat 1973; Gubitzer 1989; ColectivoSituaciones 2003; Auinger 2005; Gibson-Graham 2006; Embshoff/Giegold 2008).

However, there are still a variety of terms that all describe slightly different phenomena while referring substantially to the same theories. Klöck (1998) and Birkhölzer (2008) compare and list Solidarity Based Economy, Social Enterprises, Community Businesses or Community Economy, People's Economy, Third Sector, Economic Self-Help, Voluntary Sector and Cooperative Economy – just to name a few – as some of the most broadly discussed theoretical approaches. Currently, it seems as if the term Solidarity Economy (or 'Social and Solidarity Economy') was widely accepted in European and Anglo-American contexts (Birkhölzer 2008: 130), while 'Popular and Solidarity Economy' was the term most often found in Latin-American debates (Guerra 2007).

Considering this plurality of phenomena, it is hard to grasp the actual dimension of the field. In contrast to countries like Brazil, where the State Secretary for Solidarity Economy (SENAES), as one of its first activities, performed a detailed mapping of enterprises active in the area, data in Europe is more difficult to collect. Elmar Altvater (2005: 203f), who has been contributing some important arguments to the discussion, refers to figures published by the OECD (2003), focusing on the Non-Profit Sector. However, it would have to be examined in more detail whether the 39,5 million people working in the studied sectors in OECD countries can be considered part of a Social and Solidarity Economy. Birkhölzer (2005, cited in Altvater 2005: 204) seems to be slightly stricter in his classification for Germany and still counts 1.9 million workers in cooperative enterprises and community businesses. Apart from those difficulties with measuring the size of the sector, it is widely accepted that it is growing at a much faster pace than the overall economy. This can be interpreted as a strong indicator

of internal shifts in the labour market. Altwater confirms this conclusion in reference to the above-mentioned OECD study, where the growth rate of employment in the examined sector is stated to be four times higher than the overall increase of employment in the studied member states (Altwater 2005; *ibid.*).

In support of the conceptual delimitation of the sector, it is again Birkhölzer (2006: 69) who offers a useful description for our purposes. He distinguishes SE enterprises from traditional capitalist companies with regard to some basic elements in the constitution of the respective organizations. Following his definition, the enterprises would have to prioritize social or community oriented goals, show corporate engagement in civic action, dedicate their profits to the community economy and be organized cooperatively (*ibid.*). This definition does not explicitly include the public sector, which is usually considered part of the social economy as well. However, it refers to the conceptual basis of a Solidarity Economy and therefore facilitates a grasp of its practical implications. Birkhölzer's approach is also consistent with the three basic theoretical principles of SE, as formulated first by Vanek (1975) and used in several recent publications (Gubitzer 1989; Singer 2002; Albert 2003; Auinger 2008).

On a company level, the so-called 'democracy principle' means that decisions within the company have to be taken democratically, following the rule that one man/woman equals one vote. Unlike an organization where the amount of capital invested determines the extent of the voting power of its members, this principle enables all the members of an organization to influence the company's operational and strategic decisions. By this means, power within an organisation is distributed equally, facilitating democratic control of the production process (Singer 2002; Albert 2003).

The 'identity principle' abolishes the separation of capital and labour, as it demands that the workers of a company are at the same time its collective owners. This undermines the division of capital and labour, replacing asymmetric contracts, which represent the fundamental organizational basis of capitalism, with the egalitarian association of all company members (Singer 2002: 9).

The 'solidarity principle' finally has an internal as well as an external dimension, which extends the relational framework of work from the company itself to society as a whole. Intra-organizational solidarity, which

can be expressed by egalitarian payment systems or similar measures, is thus complemented by solidarity with non-members of a company, respectively the society as a whole. In practice, this can mean that, for example, in a region with poor educational and sanitary infrastructure, the revenues of a company are partly used to eliminate those deficits. Following Birkhölzer (2006), this last principle would refer to the priority of social or community-oriented goals being expressed in corporate engagement in the community economy, while the other two principles would be closely intertwined with the purpose and form of organization of a typical SE enterprise.

This introduction offers a theoretical and conceptual framework for the different contributions to the issue at hand. It will present some of the aspects most relevant for the debate on Solidarity Economics in the potentially conflictual context of market and state, while it tries to analyze the emancipatory capacity of the diverse forms of alternative economic activity. The subsequent articles show complementary and sometimes even mutually conflicting viewpoints. This will, in the end, provide a nuanced interdisciplinary response to the questions raised in this introduction.

I. Democracy and Capitalism

Critical political economics reveals social and economic inequality as an important problem arising from capitalist development (Polanyi 1978; Bowles et al. 2005; Milanovic 2005; Therborn 2006). Its significance is shown in its association with democracy, which should serve as an instrument of popular sovereignty, enabling people to actively shape the development and conditions of social and economic life (Novy 2002). Bowles and Gintis (1986) consider democracy and capitalism as “sharply contrasting rules regulating both the process of human development and the historical evolution of whole societies” (ibid.: 3). According to their analysis, “the one is characterized by the preeminence of economic privilege based on property rights, [while] the other insists on the priority of liberty and democratic accountability based on the exercise of personal rights” (ibid.).

Following the definition of Bowles and Gintis, the fundamental prerequisites of democracy are liberty and popular sovereignty (ibid.: 4). Liberty, on the one hand, requires freedom of thought, expression and association

amongst others components (*ibid.*). However, it involves more than just the liberal freedom of choice within markets. Novy describes it more precisely as the freedom of shaping one's own life and the world, and thus claims effective political participation (Novy 2002: 113). Popular sovereignty, on the other hand, requires accountability of power, which in turn facilitates heterogeneous expressions of the popular will via different channels and actors (Bowles/Gintis 1986: 4). Nonetheless, whether in economic or political contexts, most often hierarchies are established that limit the access to information and participation in decision-making.

On a company level we can observe the practical implications of these structural imbalances in the separation of capital and labour. The immediate result of separating the owners and workers of a company is the rise of unequal power relations and a lack of accountability in decision-making (Bowles/Gintis 1986; Singer 2002). In a sense it can therefore be said that "capitalism, more than a system of resource allocation and income distribution is a system of governance" (Bowles/Gintis 1986: XI). Or, as Aglietta (2000: 103, translation MA) puts it: "Capitalism bears in itself the ability to mobilize human energies the way that they turn into growth. It is however not capable of producing an overall cohesion from conflictive individual interests".

2. Democracy at work

Social and Solidarity Economy wants to resolve those democratic deficiencies by offering a viable alternative to the capitalist organization of the economy. In a growing number of theoretical debates and practical experiences, the concept of a whole economy based on cooperation and solidarity is shaped and propagated as a possible answer to marginalization, unemployment and unequal income distribution. Self-management, alternative forms of exchange and barter, as well as initiatives of social innovation on various scales, are elements of an economy that is built upon new values and concepts. Within the structure of the field we can observe a large number of projects that focus on a reorganization of consumption and exchange. Still, most of the theoretical contributions focus on the supply side and criticize the "original accumulation" (Marx 1986: 741ff), while they aim at facilitating

a democratic and egalitarian form of production. Therefore, cooperative production can be seen as the prototype of SE enterprises, as Singer (2002) points out. Based on the principles discussed above, production cooperatives are organized democratically, with equal decision and property rights for all parts of the organization. The solidarity principle is realized in the most diverse forms, of which one example could be the takeover of bankrupt companies by its own workers, who thereby prevent unemployment (see Faria/Cunha in this issue). Hafner, below, presents another example, as she discusses the shaping of a complex lifeworld through the means of cooperative and solidaritarian principles of organization in the case of the Mondragón network.

In those alternative forms of collective crisis management, which focus primarily on the preservation of existing jobs, we can observe an interesting transformation of subjectivities. While the workers formerly constituted “a capitalist economy through their identifications and daily practices [...] they are now constituting an economy and sociality of solidarity” (Gibson-Graham 2006: XXXV). For lack of another option, these workers continued in business and struggled for their economic survival. The big difference being that they are now working within self-managed structures, which have been built up by themselves. Yet most successfully – as in the case of Argentina after 2001 – where those self-managed companies recreated whole industries after they collapsed (ColectivoSituaciones 2003), the biggest struggle had to be fought against themselves. Gibson-Graham interpret this as taking up the challenge of economic subjectivity that had been pointed out by Michel Foucault. According to their interpretation, the experiences discussed are capable of liberating us “both from the economy and from the type of individualization that is linked to the economy” (Foucault 1983: 216, as cited in Gibson-Graham 2006: *ibid.*). Whether or not such a transformation of subjectivities actually results in a democratization of social frameworks beyond the work environment is analyzed critically by Moldaschl and Weber in this issue. They also present a typology of participative enterprises according to the material and immaterial range of workplace participation. Hafner contributes important arguments to this debate from a sociological perspective, when she examines the effects of democratic organizational structures on the lifeworld within and beyond the coopera-

tive network of Mondragón. Her analysis also deals with the law of transformation, which will be explained below.

In accordance with Gibson-Graham's conclusion that "our economy is what we (discursively and practically) make it" (Gibson-Graham 2006: XXXV, original emphasis), most of today's theoretical debates refer to the same ideological roots, as they incorporate elements of Utopian Socialism and its first practical experiences in the Co-Operative movement of the 19th century. The 'Rochdale Pioneers' (see, for example, Birchall 1994 for a detailed description), which are widely accepted as the first successful practical implementation of the theories discussed, are still referred to as an important first historical experience of Solidarity Economy (Gubitzer 1989; Singer 2002; Albert 2003). However, the main purpose of the Rochdale Pioneers' cooperative was to acquire consumer goods collectively, hence obtaining quantity discounts and high quality as they were endowed with strong bargaining power. As such, it is an example of the second type of solidarity based enterprises as discussed by Singer (2002: 39-108) – the consumption cooperative. The Brazilian author furthermore lists the already mentioned production cooperatives and credit cooperatives that facilitate small productive investments for collective enterprises. The Grameen Bank, founded by Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus, would be a popular example of this latter category. In addition, Singer (2002) cites buy-and-sell cooperatives, which are comparable to the pure consumer cooperative as illustrated by the Rochdale example and – as the last type – Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETs) that establish alternative markets for goods and services, frequently employing alternative currencies.

Even though the political and economic situation has changed fundamentally since the days of the Rochdale Pioneers, some practical challenges of cooperative organization have stayed the same. Essential for the implementation of the model, as it has been presented above, is the existence of democratic organs and regular assemblies within the organization. In order to build up a system of cooperation based on democratic decisions in an environment free of asymmetric power division, this aspect is usually heavily debated. What does it mean to decide collectively and how can the company be flexible enough to facilitate operational effectiveness in this regard?

One primary goal behind the democratic principle is the abolition of information asymmetries, which goes along with an equal distribution of

decision power. In this model, which is discussed here, the traditional flows of information will be inverted by giving the general assembly of all organizational members the power to actually give orders to the management. Consequently, the latter is made a solely operative organ with full accountability to the organization as a whole. While the coordinating functions within the organisation would thus facilitate a top-down flow of information, the orders would then be given bottom-up from the general assembly to the coordinating organs (Singer 2002). Figure 1 below illustrates this relational setting in comparison with a traditional capitalist firm.

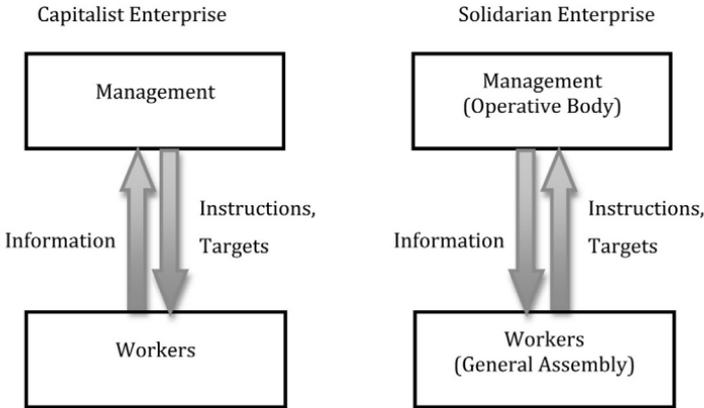


Figure 1: Organizational structures in capitalist and solidarian enterprises
 Source: Own elaboration, based on Leubolt (2007) and Singer (2002: 16ff)

Some authors criticize the rising coordination-costs in such a form of organization, as compared with traditional companies (Prohammer 1991; Niehues 1994). The involvement of more people in decision-making requires a broader distribution of operative and strategic data and the necessary access to economic and political background information. Apart from that fact, which is closely intertwined with the required educational level of the workers, the market situation also requires a certain degree of agility and flexibility from the company. The introduction of representative democratic elements, as for instance a representative council, which would serve

as a legitimate operative organ, therefore seems to be useful (Niehues 1994). The fundamental difference for the executive board of a typical stock corporation would be that this organ needs to be democratically elected and that its members can be replaced whenever necessary.

Even in the flattest hierarchy, it is difficult to avoid emerging tendencies towards a hierarchy of experts, as the access as well as the mental perception and processing of information will not be the same for every worker. A rotation of tasks and duties, on an operative as well as on a coordinating level, and the installation of educational programmes, which would provide a balanced distribution of knowledge within the organisation, would therefore be necessary in order to cushion those inequalities (Singer 2002, 2004b; Gintis et al. 2005; Harley 2005). Something that has turned out to be very effective in this context is the installation of balanced job complexes, as proposed by Albert (2003). Every worker would then perform operative and coordinating tasks and responsibilities, which would eradicate the “division between those who overwhelmingly monopolize empowering, fulfilling, and engaging tasks and those who are overwhelmingly saddled with rote, obedient and dangerous tasks” (ibid.: 10). The positive effects on motivation and innovation, which would attenuate the often-observed tendency towards self-exploitation, are agreed on by most authors and can be seen as an important potential of this form of organization (Bowles/Gintis 1986; Gubitzer 1989; Singer 2002; Albert 2003).

3. Emancipation or self-help?

However, the question remains as to whether a movement towards SE, with a majority of initiatives being born from necessity (ColectivoSituaciones 2003; Altvater 2008), represents a mere reaction, motivated by self-help, to precarious living and working conditions, or if it is possible to identify a bigger emancipatory project of social change behind it (Altvater 2006). The answer to that question is strongly tied to problems arising from the growth of the movement. As successful initiatives grow bigger they face the ‘law of transformation’, which goes back to the elaborations of Franz Oppenheimer (1896). It describes one of the main problems of economically successful cooperatives: either they accumulate so much capital that personal

relations and solidaristic cooperation step back and lose relevance within the organization, which leads to a loss of the cooperative character and a conversion into a traditional capitalist company, or they are economically unsuccessful and keep on serving as mere self-help organizations (Oppenheimer 1896; Altvater 2008) that correspond to an “ideologically justified alternative to unemployment” (Lima 2007: 612, translation MA). In reality, most of the problems we are confronted with in the development of SE enterprises might be situated somewhere in between those two extremes. Still, in the sense described by Oppenheimer, they support tendencies towards workfare-systems, which refer to a fundamental transformation of the state that strategically re-aligns its social policies according to the requirements of de-regulated labour markets and balanced national budgets (Peck/Theodore 2000). Based on these observations, one could ask whether SE can in fact offer a real large scale alternative to capitalism, or if it is just one alternative amongst others within the capitalist system that will cushion its dysfunctional effects (Altvater 2008; Auinger 2008).

One possible remedy for the law of transformation could be the construction of solidarity networks, as proposed by Mance (2003). He suggests building up productive chains, which integrate different production and distribution stages of a certain good, thereby establishing a system of mutual support of SE enterprises. Together, this shall strengthen the sector and make it less vulnerable to competition from capitalist companies. Furthermore, cooperation with distribution channels based on ethical consumption and fair trade, or institutional ties to universities and local governments, can be very beneficial in this regard (Cattani 2003; Singer 2004a; Auinger 2005). This could also help to neutralize the ‘neoliberalism from below’, as identified by Wilpert (2003) and Altvater (2005), especially in the informal and precarious segments of the economy. Their arguments dismantle the idea of the informal sector as being a shock absorber of globalisation, which sustains existing power structures while only seemingly abolishing the socio-economic exclusion of its proponents. In fact, we can instead observe an adaptation to external market conditions, which manage to integrate the sector in a subordinate form into the economy. As a result, the individual and collective subjects take care of their social rights themselves as far as they can, which is yet another sign of a disembedding of

the market from society that gives human destiny over to market forces, as Polanyi concluded (Polanyi, cited in Altvater 2005: 208f).

Nevertheless, as Altvater (2005: 192) shows, the often propagated ‘neoliberalism from below’ cannot be an argument in favour of the surreal promises of Liberalism. Not all people are entrepreneur types, and, even more importantly, it is simply impossible that all people are born as capitalists, as these heavily depend on labour for the generation of profits. As a result, there have to be workers that depend on wages too. Furthermore, the income and property distribution is mostly not considered in liberal explanations, a fact which dismantles them even more and reveals them to be pure propaganda (ibid.).

Solidarity Economics could be a model of how to offset such liberal tendencies by means of the collective development of alternative economies. Recent trends of institutionalization seem to be supportive of the sector as they provide a sound network of technical and legal support whilst creating alternative collective structures of economy. In this context, Latin America is leading the way, with a ministry for community economy (MINEC) in Venezuela and a state secretary for Solidarity Economy (SENAES) in Brazil, amongst administrative bodies in several other countries of the continent. In this way, social policy in Brazil and Venezuela is being implemented in an integrated approach of income distribution and emancipative poverty alleviation in a Popular and Solidarity Economy. While in Venezuela the promotion of Solidarity Economy represents an essential part of Chavez’s ‘Socialism of the 21st Century’, the situation in Brazil is quite different. There, the state secretary is institutionally located within the Ministry of Labour, which leads to a relatively conflictual setting, with traditional labour market policies on one side and innovative policies, taking into account the big dimension of informal and precarious labour and income sources, on the other. With a relatively low budget, the state secretary is financially dependent on other ministries, as it focuses on promoting an “equitable and solidarian development of society and economy” (SENAES 2008). An extension of social and labour rights to people engaged in SE initiatives includes marginalized parts of society in the welfare system and puts them on a par with people working in the formal economy. Besides supporting ethical and fair trade, creating solidarian forms of financing and proper legal settings for modern cooperatives, as well as promoting the rehabilitation of bank-

rupt companies in self-managed structures, the emphasis in Brazil lies on the distribution of goods and services being offered by the SE sector (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, legal initiatives seem to be crucial, as there is a growing need for supporting laws in the creation of cooperatives and in facilitating access to various traditional as well as new forms of financing. In this respect, political initiatives can already be observed in Europe as well, which might be a sign of the growth of the sector in the Northern hemisphere.

Apart from developments on a governmental level, we can also observe the increasing popularity of employee ownership in traditional capitalist companies. However, most of these models appear foreshortened in their approaches, as they often don't integrate actual participation and democracy or special information rights for all their workers. Moldaschl and Weber show in their article that this is due to the different premises on which they are based, which again reveals their instrumental character. In such cases, employee ownership can in fact signify a salary or wage reduction due to the variable part of the personal monthly income. Furthermore, it remains to be examined whether these models predominantly favour a special group of workers that can take advantage of the ownership plans. In addition, they are not capable of disabling market pressure and still favour economic over social objectives. To sum up, these approaches won't be able to bring about an equalization of capital and labour, which is mostly not the purpose they have been designed for, but which would be a fundamental pre-requisite in the construction of an alternative economy (Nutzinger 1982; Singer 2002; Demirovic 2007).

In the face of such challenges, and despite the rather euphoric picture of another world that is possible, which the majority of debates paint, we observe that many real-life struggles fail in their attempts to disable capitalist logics of markets. Therefore, the question has to be raised, if – and if so, to what extent – elements of state and market are necessary to facilitate alternative economics on a bigger scale and solve the double dilemma of local initiatives in the context of a capitalist state (Leubolt/Auinger 2006). Initiatives that ignore state-power and the capitalist logics that surround them run the risk of failing at the limits of localism or being integrated, subordinately, into existing power structures. The above-mentioned problems that SE enterprises face in terms of fundraising and legalisation would be examples of this first case, which we can observe in a large number of

local experiences worldwide. In the absence of ideological compromises, their economic survival often depends on public support. However, even if they are endowed with the necessary support of other market participants and the state, they are confronted with the 'law of transformation' as they grow bigger. In such cases, it won't take long until the ideological bases as well as the organizational principles of the project are negatively affected. On the contrary, we will also see a tendency towards incorporation into existing power structures, if the project appears to be economically robust or politically successful in terms of poverty alleviation. Subsequently, the project will be integrated into existing power structures, as it sustains the current system by encouraging self-help instead of raising political demands. The experiences described by Lemaître (in this issue) point at similar developments in the context of public and labour market policies.

Paradoxically, similar developments are also to be feared if political struggles circulate only around taking state-power, while the movements of self-management forget to build networks outside of the official state-apparatus. The Yugoslavian experiment of a socialism based on self-management (Horvat 1973; Zakošek 1984; Hunnius 2005), as well as parts of the Venezuelan (Wilpert 2003; Herdin 2005) and Brazilian (SENAES 2005: 8ff; Auinger 2008; FBES 2008; Singer 2008) experiences are examples of that tendency. To sum up, the question is how to prevent the state from replacing the revolutionary movement from below in a "passive revolution" (Gramsci 1971: 106ff; Buci-Glucksmann 1979) and therefore leading to a transformation from above (Poulantzas 2002; Leubolt/Auinger 2006: 44).

Marxist critique also points out these reformist and counter-revolutionary risks in SE, as it diagnoses the encouraging of small-business attitudes within the working class and the fact that SE goes along very well with liberal economics and the above discussed 'neoliberalism from below' (Lima 2007; Menezes 2007). Especially in connection with microcredits or similar forms of financing, it incorporates disadvantaged parts of society into rent-seeking logics of financial markets (Menezes 2007). However, there are promising ways out of the presented precarious and individualistic forms of SE. More regulation and coordination on a regional and supra-regional scale could offer macroeconomic perspectives to the sector and establish labour and social rights that are accessible to all parts of society. In terms of a radical reformism (Leubolt 2006: 51ff), we could then replace institution-

alized power structures within labour relations by democratic processes and collective action.

In the light of the points discussed in this introduction, the present issue of the journal is not a mere description of the diversity of the movement, but rather offers a critical analysis of its transformative potential for the economy and society. For this purpose, current developments in Latin America and Europe as well as historical experiences shall be discussed critically, showing their limits and opportunities. The discussed interrelation of democracy on a company level, social responsibility and political democratization offer insights into the transformative promises of those forms of economy as well as providing an empirical basis for the discussion and analysis of the conflictual relation of democracy and capitalism. The context of social policies offers perspectives on this approach within the state. All together, it is hoped that this will facilitate a critical up-to-date evaluation of the approach, which will answer some of the questions raised in this introduction.

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Abstracts

The continuing debate about Solidarity Economics discusses initiatives, in the most diverse social spheres, which want to offer alternatives to a capitalism governed by the financial markets. Self-management, alternative forms of exchange and barter, as well as various social experiments, are elements of an economy, which shall be built upon new values and concepts. The focus on the supply side criticizes the 'original accumulation', as described by Marx, and aims at facilitating a democratic and egalitarian form of production. Many examples in southern countries as well as in Europe show that it is possible to realize alternative forms of production and economy on different scales. The only remaining question is whether they represent a mere reaction to precarious living and working conditions motivated by self-help, or if it is possible to identify an emancipatory project of social change behind it.

Unter der Bezeichnung Solidarische Ökonomie werden seit geraumer Zeit Initiativen diskutiert, die in verschiedenen gesellschaftlichen Bereichen Alternativen zum finanzmarktgesteuerten Kapitalismus anbieten wollen. Betriebliche Selbstverwaltung, alternative Formen des Tausches sowie vielfältige soziale Experimente sind jene zentralen Elemente einer Ökonomie, die auf neuen Werten und Konzepten aufbauen soll. Der angebotsseitige Fokus kritisiert die „ursprüngliche Akkumulation“ im marxischen Sinn und zielt darauf ab, eine demokratische und egalitäre Produktion von Waren und Dienstleistungen zu ermöglichen. Zahlreiche Beispiele aus südlichen Ländern, aber auch aus Europa zeigen, dass es möglich ist, alternative Produktions- und Wirtschaftskonzepte in unterschiedlichen Dimensionen umzusetzen. Fraglich ist dabei, ob es sich lediglich um Reaktionen auf prekäre Lebens- und Arbeitsbedingungen handelt, mit dem Motiv der Selbsthilfe, oder ob dahinter ein emanzipatorisches Projekt mit gesellschaftsveränderndem Potenzial steht.

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