

1 | SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Jean-Louis Laville

Introduction

To understand the challenges of expanding and consolidating social and solidarity economy (SSE), it is important to examine how such forms of institutions evolved historically. Over two centuries, there have been numerous changes in their character and trajectories, largely accounted for by the relations between state, market and society. This type of analysis is essential if we are to understand both the structural and the institutional determinants of scaling up and the substance of SSE.

As the introduction to this volume explains, the umbrella concept of SSE encompasses very different types of enterprises and associations: cooperatives, mutual associations, social enterprises and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), among others. In this chapter we argue that different historical junctures generate contexts that largely explain the rise and fall of different forms of SSE. Drawing in particular on the experience of Europe and South America, this chapter begins by examining the evolution of democratic solidarity throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, identifying various shifts in orientation. These involved: early forms of associative democracy, the ‘welfare state’, social economy centred on non-profits and cooperatives; and, more recently, solidarity economy, focused on both economic and political empowerment. It then goes on to specify key differences between these forms and their implications for environmental and social justice.

Market and solidarity in nineteenth-century Europe

The invention of modern solidarity emerged in the early nineteenth century, in the wake of democratic revolutions. The notion of a modern solidarity was defined as an integrating force, not anchored on inherited relations (those of family, kinship and lineage) but created in a deliberate way by humans having acquired clear

awareness of the societal bonds that connect them. This recognises the importance of a social link that is neither rooted in religious feeling – as, for example, in the case of charity – nor able to be reduced to a contractual relationship. This also underlines the intentional aspect of this modern solidarity, which acknowledges the interdependency of individuals and groups. Consequently, the move into modernity was not simply a move from community to society; rather, it was characterised by the condition of an open political community that overcomes differences and promotes equality through the recognition of public spaces.

In the first part of the nineteenth century – the era of revolutions, to use Hobsbawm’s (1962) expression – modern solidarity was mostly expressed through people organising themselves collectively in associations. Groups that were denied dignity as citizens and suffered exploitation rebelled against their exclusion and poor treatment. The contradiction between alleged equality and the persistence of inequalities placed in sharp relief the incompatibility of political freedom and economic subservience. The solidarity that was being called upon to claim a more open public space was also invoked to organise the economy on an egalitarian basis. In this first stage, a move occurred towards the mushrooming of all types of associations (Dewey 1953). The unfolding of modern solidarity could logically be said to be democratic. It focused on mutual help as much as on protest activities, and had characteristics of collective action through both the self-organisation of workers and producers and contestation via social movements, which implied equal rights among the people involved. On the basis of free access to the public domain for all citizens, it aimed to reinforce political democracy through economic and social democracy. It was thus a moral economy of popular origin (Scott 1976; Thompson 1963) that was undergoing experimentation aimed at maintaining common goods, reinforced by reciprocal obligations and shared conceptions of rights.

In the second part of the nineteenth century, this momentum was cut short. Another definition of solidarity emerged as an alternative to solidarity defined as a principle of democratisation resulting from collective action. The vocabulary of equality was replaced by that of benevolence and paternalism. Philanthropic solidarity corresponded to this second form of modern solidarity, which referred to a vision of an ethical society in which citizens motivated by altruism fulfilled

their duties to each other on a voluntary basis. This evolution was inseparable from a pessimistic perspective on liberalism, haunted by pauperism, which recommended both helping the poor and controlling their behaviour. The moral economy of pioneering friendly and mutual societies was therefore replaced by an enterprise of moralisation of the poor, according to Thompson (1963).

Philanthropic solidarity replaced the fight for equality with the fight against poverty, and made solidarity a private affair and an individual responsibility. Supported by advocates of the established order, philanthropic solidarity redrew the associative landscape. By repressing independent associations, by discouraging workers' associations and by simultaneously encouraging charities and patronising associations, this reinterpretation of the nature of associative activity complemented efforts to reinforce the economy by linking power with shareholding. This second stage corresponded to the advent of the ideology of progress, which prioritised the Industrial Revolution and economic growth in order to increase the wealth of nations and to eliminate poverty and social conflict. However, despite the advantages that derived from philanthropic solidarity, the social question remained. Ongoing threats to civil peace made the philanthropic solution untenable; inequalities in the human condition could not be attributed to the responsibility of the individual, and, by the end of the nineteenth century, the fundamental limits of philanthropic solidarity had become apparent.

Bringing in the twentieth-century state

Democratic solidarity regained the upper hand when sociological inquiry opposed economic liberalism and reaffirmed the concern for social cohesion. The holistic vision of society as more than the sum of the individuals of which it was composed critiqued an approach to solidarity confined to the private sphere; it stressed the public dimension of solidarity, centred on rights. However, this form of democratic solidarity differed from earlier versions. Faith in associations was replaced by control of the market by public authorities. The state promoted a specific social mode of organisation, which made it possible to extend the market economy while making it compatible with the citizenship of workers. The divides caused by the market economy had to be corrected through policy and legal interventions – hence the concept of social rights that combined

workers' rights within the enterprise with social protection aiming to protect workers against specific risks. The social question led to the separation of the economic (specifically, the market economy) and the social (i.e. a legal mode of protection of society). Such a compromise, based on the partition and complementarity of the market and the social state, was reinforced progressively. After the Second World War, when it proved necessary to support national consensus, this complementarity between the state and the market attained its full significance. The development model that was stabilised in twentieth-century Europe was based on the synergy between the market and the state, which had the effect of crowding out various forms of associative activity. The Keynesian state aimed to enhance economic development through the use of new tools of knowledge and intervention. Public investment in sectors deemed particularly viable, and labour market policy aimed at working conditions and wages, made it possible to find stable ways to accommodate the particular interests of enterprises alongside the general interest of society. But the main shift was in income redistribution, through which the social state became the so-called 'welfare state': the setting up of the latter aimed to fulfil the promise to protect citizens from illness, accidents, old age and unemployment. The generalisation of social protection had to ensure security for a population that had endured the Depression of the 1930s and the sacrifices of two World Wars. The welfare state extended the previous forms of social state with social security and generalised social protection systems. At the same time, the state framed and supported the market as much as it corrected market inequalities; the synergy between the state and the market was expressed, in particular, through new institutional arrangements, including social security and collective bargaining, as well as by gains in productivity.

Crisis, civil society and social innovation

The socio-economic compromise described above underwent a cultural crisis in the 1970s with the rise of experiments in both self-management and new social movements, which unsettled the culture underlying the synergy between the market and the state. Conflicts in enterprises no longer concerned merely collective negotiation, centred on the distribution of the value-added. Contestation also emerged around modes of organisation and the lack of opportu-

ities for salaried workers to express themselves. The trend towards workers' self-management reflected these demands, and resembled earlier forms of associative democracy by distancing itself from the representation granted to workers' movements in industrial society.

More importantly, the nature of contestation could no longer be reduced to the clash between capital and labour; it extended to consumption and ways of life. Although the rallying cries of the new social movements remained disparate, anti-nuclear, environmental and feminist protests articulated and popularised new questions around the social and environmental costs of 'progress' and commodification. Standards and aspirations imposed during the post-war growth period were no longer self-evident. Claims for a better quality of life emerged. What was questioned was the very basis of the development model, which hitherto had enjoyed a broad consensus. The ideology of progress was questioned seriously, as was the future of economic society (i.e. a society shaped by the struggle against scarcity and by productivism) more broadly. These questions led to changes in forms of public intervention. Political activism and social innovation combined to question the status quo and the balance of power, and led to experiments with alternative ways of organising production and exchange.

However, the self-management and alternative trends that had fed upon the social effervescence that followed on from the May 1968 protests in France soon lost their momentum. The capacity of new social movements to attract and unite declined. Their participants began to disperse to other civil society initiatives aimed at building new ways of producing, providing services and living. Some occupied the growing space for NGOs, which, from the neoclassical economics perspective, were a response to market failures in the provision of individual services and to state failures in the provision of collective services. According to this viewpoint, not only were the market, state and non-profit sector separated conceptually, but the latter was promoted as a second- or third-rank option, to be adopted only when the solutions provided by the market and the state were deemed inadequate (Evers and Laville 2004). Some proponents of the non-profit sector also adopted an ideological view that this sector could justify the withdrawal of the state.

In numerous other respects the non-profit model proved problematic from the perspective of democratic solidarity and collective

action. The key role of the non-distribution constraint as the basis for legitimacy and trust soon weakened. The reputation of NGOs was often tarnished by elite capture – excessively cosy relationships with states, politicians and business, and the obvious connection of NGO activity with the personal material interests of those who controlled them. Furthermore, market activity through, for example, consultancy and local ‘proximity services’ (such as educational training or care for the elderly and infirm) penetrated the ‘non-profit’ field. Other mechanisms for cultivating trust, related to standards and certification, also came to the fore and were adopted by for-profit enterprises that began to compete in the trustworthiness stakes through the discourse and practices of corporate social responsibility.

Under the non-profit model, human decisions often conform to ‘rational choice’. In this model, ‘society’ results from the activity of individuals and their interest-oriented choices, which aim to maximise their advantages (Etzioni 1988). The role of non-profit organisations (NPOs) is restricted to the production of services; other important dimensions, such as social integration and democratic participation, tend to be sidelined.

Beyond the usual NPO and NGO models, some innovations and organisational forms were precursors to ‘another world is possible’, the scenario popularised by the alter-globalisation movement via the World Social Forum. Various forms of social innovation saw workers and producers re-engaging with economic activities, as though the democratisation of society required the democratisation of the economy. Moreover, these experiences concerned not only production but also consumption and ways of life. Social innovations are observed in local proximity services, fair trade, solidarity tourism, organic agriculture, ethical consumption, short supply chains, renewable energies, recycling and waste valorisation, heritage preservation, microfinance and social currencies, for example. These social innovations involve a redefinition of the social contract on the basis of democratic solidarity. Proponents of this trend are concerned about threats (such as climate change) and irreversible damage to ‘natural capital’, which no amount of technical capital can replace and which, consequently, should be protected from the logic of the market. They are also concerned with threats to human and social capital, particularly when inequalities grow, and care, education and health are no longer preserved as public or commons goods (Ostrom

1990). This strong version of solidarity puts economy back into its role as a means to achieve goals of social justice and environmental sustainability, whose content results from political deliberation.

Social and solidarity economy: a new twenty-first-century synergy?

In the nineteenth century, solidarity via associations that combined economic, social and political objectives gave way to a social economy comprising a set of organisations with non-capitalist status (cooperatives, associations, mutual societies). But during most of the twentieth century, while such organisations had some economic weight, they had no real political strength. As described above, the social innovations of the last part of the twentieth century were categorised in Europe and South America under the term ‘solidarity economy’. This shares commonalities with the social economy but it revives a more political dimension, and it can be defined as a set of activities contributing to democratise the economy through citizens’ involvement. According to Lipietz (2001), the solidarity economy adds to the social economy – which focuses on internal functioning – an awareness of the importance of the goals pursued (from environmental to cultural goals) and a necessity to complement formal equality among members with modes of direct participation.

The tradition of social economy and the resurgence of associative democracy in the late twentieth century have generated a new theoretical perspective: the SSE. It critiques the non-profit approach, which tends to dominate international development discourse regarding the role and nature of civil society, and it creates an original framework of analysis by mixing social economy and solidarity economy viewpoints. The core elements of each approach, which are now coming together both conceptually and strategically, include those discussed below.

The social economy The term ‘social economy’, as understood in Europe, defines a set of organisations that is broader than the non-profit sector (Salamon and Anheier 1997). Indeed, ‘non-profit’ excludes cooperatives and mutual societies on the grounds that they can distribute part of their profits to their members. This exclusion cannot be justified in many continental contexts for several reasons. Firstly, some cooperatives, such as building cooperatives in Sweden, have never distributed any profits. Secondly, in all cases

the distribution of profits is limited, since cooperatives and mutual societies are akin to associations: they are not created with a view to obtaining a return on the capital invested, but rather with the goal of satisfying the general interest or a mutual interest, to contribute to public welfare or to meet social demands expressed by some categories of the population.

Furthermore, social economy organisations are defined legally not by the ban on the distribution on profits, but rather by the fact that the material interest of investors is subject to limits. Consequently, the border is not drawn between for-profit and non-profit organisations but rather between capitalist and social economy organisations, the latter giving priority to the setting up of a collective patrimony over the return on individual investment. In other words, at the organisational level, the social economy framework stresses all of the legal forms that limit the private appropriation of benefits. This limitation on the distribution of profits is what gives social economy organisations their specificity, compared with other productive organisations. Beyond their differences, these organisations share a common tradition – different from the North American tradition – that insists less on the non-distribution constraint, philanthropy and volunteering than on collective actions based on mutual help and the participation of citizens concerned about social problems.

Building on a long history, the social economy perspective imposed itself as a legal approach. This had the advantage of facilitating the statistical identification of the organisations concerned, since it covered three components: cooperatives, mutual societies and non-profit organisations. However, as experts acknowledge, although the adoption of any of these legal forms is ‘a significant step towards joining the social economy – this in itself does not guarantee that it will become part of [it]’ (Defourny et al. 1999: 30). In certain countries, enterprises are frequently cooperative in name only. Similarly, an associative or mutualist legal form sometimes provides a legal cover for para-public agencies and for-profit economic activities. A normative approach combined with the legal approach has thus gained currency. The resulting definition states that:

[the] social economy includes all economic activities conducted by enterprises, primarily cooperatives, associations and mutual benefit societies, whose ethics convey the following principles: placing

service to members or the community ahead of profit; autonomous management; a democratic decision-making process; the primacy of people and work over capital in the distribution of revenues (ibid.: 30).

These principles give a more accurate description of the functioning of organisations but also challenge the simplicity of classification offered by the legal approach. This explains much of the ambiguity in the analysis of the social economy, which oscillates between the inclusion of all organisations with the cited legal forms (when the aim is to show their importance in the economy) and the exclusion of some organisations because of the gap between the observable reality and their affirmed principles.

Beyond these legal and normative aspects, social economy is characterised by its system of rules governing the specificities of its organisations. These rules include the voluntary action of a group of persons (Vienney 1994) who are reciprocally linked by a relation of association and economic activity, the equal rights of members, and the fact that the distribution of the operating surplus among the associated persons, when it exists, is proportional to their activities within the enterprise. The cooperative model became the reference point for the whole of the social economy, which led to including in the latter only those associations that are enterprises (Vienney 1980–82). In other words, in the field of social economy, the associative phenomenon is recognised only under the form of entrepreneurial associations. According to this conception, the social economy is composed of non-capitalist enterprises and the indicator of their success is an increase in the volume of their market activities. Questions of internal functioning and the non-market spheres of the economy receive little, if any, attention. Thus, non-profit organisations whose resources largely come from redistribution and volunteering are borderline. They do not fit comfortably within a social economy whose charter, for instance in France, states that its components ‘live in the market economy’ and develop ‘institutions that the traditional market economy does not generate’. This definition evaluates cooperatives, mutual societies and non-profit organisations in terms of the evolution of the relations between their members and in terms of their economic results, examined from the point of view of their degree of integration in the market economy.

The solidarity economy By defining itself as a set of organisations, the social economy leaves open the broader question of its insertion into both the economy and democracy. Questioning these two aspects gave birth to the solidarity economy perspective that has gained prominence during the past two decades, particularly in Europe and Latin America.

From an economic viewpoint, the solidarity economy approach centres on conceptual insights that insist on the plurality of economic principles and propose an expansive definition of the economy based on the following (Polanyi 1944):

- the market principle, which allows the supply of and demand for goods and services to meet – exchange happens on the basis of the setting of prices;
- redistribution, which is the principle according to which production is delegated to a central authority responsible for allocating it; and
- reciprocity, which corresponds to the relationship established among groups or individuals thanks to actions that make sense only insofar as they express a will to demonstrate a social link among the stakeholders.

Today, as in the past, any reflection on the relationship between economy and democracy is enriched by adopting a more realistic, and less ideological, view than the narrowly focused market economy perspective. Another approach is provided by a plural economy perspective in which the market is but one of the components (Hart et al. 2010).

It is true that the relative roles of the three economic principles – market, redistribution and reciprocity – have varied greatly throughout history and were profoundly affected by the rise of modern democracy. Here, not only was the market principle diffused, but the market was made largely autonomous and ‘disembedded’ from social relations. Despite this, a real democratic and solidarity-based invention also formed, and public redistribution saw its rules enacted through representative democracy. Reciprocity could unfold on the basis of voluntary commitments, in the public space, of free and equal citizens. The recognition of individual rights made possible the development of a solidarity that, in a market context, was defined through the combination of egalitarian reciprocity and

public redistribution. The solidarity economy approach thus stresses the mix of these three principles, even though their respective weight and form vary. Combining resources from these three principles is also a way to protect against the phenomena of institutional isomorphism or marginalisation. But such a hybridisation implies linking the economic dimension with the political.

Associations were indeed the first line of defence elaborated by society before being relayed by the state (Evers and Laville 2004: 23–5). One of the benefits of solidarity economy is that it can integrate initiatives of civil society into the public space of modern democratic societies. The relations between these initiatives and public authorities are therefore key. Associations are thus linked to the dual dimensions of politics: non-institutional politics, centred on the potential for active citizenship which supposes that citizens make use of the positive freedom to which they are formally entitled; and institutional politics, centred on the exercise of power. The interactions between public authorities and civil society initiatives translate into mutual effects, the intensity and modalities of which vary greatly over time. On the one hand, the initiatives of various social actors, through their very existence, contribute to the evolution of forms of public regulation. On the other hand, rules enacted by public authorities influence the trajectories of initiatives. Isolating organisations without grasping how they relate to the public sphere amounts to ignoring the institutional dimension.

The challenges of realising democratic solidarity

The history of the twentieth century reveals two difficulties in realising democratic solidarity. The first is represented by the objective of a post-capitalist economy that has been implemented in a dogmatic way through top-down approaches that are disconnected from real-world plural institutions and grass-roots participation. The second consists of a confusion between democratic solidarity and philanthropy, which reduces social action not only to voluntary giving but also to other aspects of state and business practice that relate to ‘safety nets’ and corporate social responsibility.

The dangers and pitfalls of authoritarian models There was a persistent temptation within radical thought concerned with egalitarianism and social justice to stress the need for a wholesale alternative to

capitalism. While this was a failure, it does not mean that there is only one natural economy identified with the market principle. Furthermore, the return of the utopian experiment of a self-regulating market under neoliberal capitalism prompted a societal response that called for a project of democratic transformation. When considering such a project, it is important to remember that the self-regulating market in the 1930s led to authoritarian regimes: it generated so much uncertainty that it created the ground for Nazism and Stalinism. We cannot repeat this terror and we have to be conscious that market ideologists are forging a counter-movement of religious fundamentalisms. To overcome these dangers, it is crucial to mobilise economic principles other than the market (namely reciprocity and redistribution), to institutionally embed the market once more in a perspective of solidarity economy, and to establish non-capitalist enterprises, i.e. recognising the diverse forms of property within the social economy arena.

In order to move in such a direction, democratic solidarity is essential. It starts, as Mauss (1954) insisted, with recognising that this solidarity rests on a particular relationship between reciprocity and redistribution, between the voluntary collective actions of equal citizens and the state's attempts to redress inequalities. The institutional base of SSE includes self-organisation in civil society (unions, cooperatives, mutual insurance and non-profit organisations) and social protection by public rules. It is not a question of replacing reciprocal solidarity with redistributive solidarity, but of combining one with the other to renew the concept of social change.

The twentieth century left us with two extreme cases that we should avoid in the future: on the one hand, there was the subordination of economy to a political will whose egalitarianism was a mask for coercion; on the other, a market society was created whose inequality was justified by an appeal for individual freedom. The contemporary challenge is to find new ways of guaranteeing a plural economy within a framework of democracy.

The public debate over the different meanings of the economy has to be reopened in this light; if not, any discussion about the levers of change or the conditions of transition would be impoverished. If we are to harness our efforts at making the economy compatible with an idea of socio-political transformation, we need to understand and explain the dimensions of economic life that have been

obscured by the naturalisation of the economy's current dominant form. Following in the footsteps of Mauss and Polanyi, and taking their contributions separately and together, opens the way to an emancipatory project that is explicitly mindful of a politics that, paradoxically, was banished by revolutionary rhetoric. The plural reality of the economy, including democratic solidarity, can pave the way for a democratisation process in contemporary societies.

The return of philanthropic solidarity The democratisation hypothesis above is contested by another eventuality: the extension of capitalism along philanthropic lines. Contemporary capitalism is less dependent on the mediation of goods to accumulate capital and more sensitive to the capacity for permanent innovation unfolding within itself. The accumulation of capital depends greatly on the accumulation of knowledge. This new regime, which followed the so-called Fordist model of the post-war boom, was said to be patrimonial or shareholder-based, and was linked to numerous innovations in work (just-in-time, re-engineering, total quality management), financial products (derivatives, employee savings plans, pension funds) and trade (the internet, online retailing). For example, Yunus (2007: 48–74), a key proponent of microcredit, argues that capitalism is a half-developed structure that can worthily be complemented by an ‘enterprise oriented to a cause rather than to profit’. A ‘flood of creativity ... able to change the world’ (ibid.: 10) is expected from this innovating entrepreneurship, referred to as ‘social business’. The social entrepreneur is then considered a particular type of actor, playing the role of a catalyst for social change – a change agent – putting forward innovative ideas to tackle social and environmental problems. Such philanthropic capitalism is also supported by donor investors concerned about the impacts of their donations; this is ‘venture philanthropy’, a modernised philanthropy mindful of the evaluation of the social results of its financial contributions. This approach could re-legitimate capitalism if it can cultivate innovation to create economic value and entrepreneurialism, boost growth, and solve the related social and environmental problems. Prahalad (2004) agreed with this when he put forward the ‘bottom of the pyramid’ approach, whereby the poorest populations – the 4 billion people living on less than US\$2 a day – are engaged either as producers and suppliers in value chains or as consumers of products and

services. This requires that the enterprise changes its perception of these people's needs in order to meet them. This approach, according to its proponents, is a powerful lever that can be observed in several success stories.

From this point of view, multidimensional innovation helps to reconcile capitalism and society through corporate responsibility: that is, the 'social business' and the 'bottom of the pyramid' make up a system congruent with corporate social responsibility. The new spirit of capitalism combines a humanist societal discourse with renewed competitiveness, with both correlated to a high level of social innovation. At the historic moment when structural adjustment plans implemented in the South are set to spread to the North, the aim is to claim the potential of self-regulation and self-correction contained in the market relationship and in entrepreneurial action.

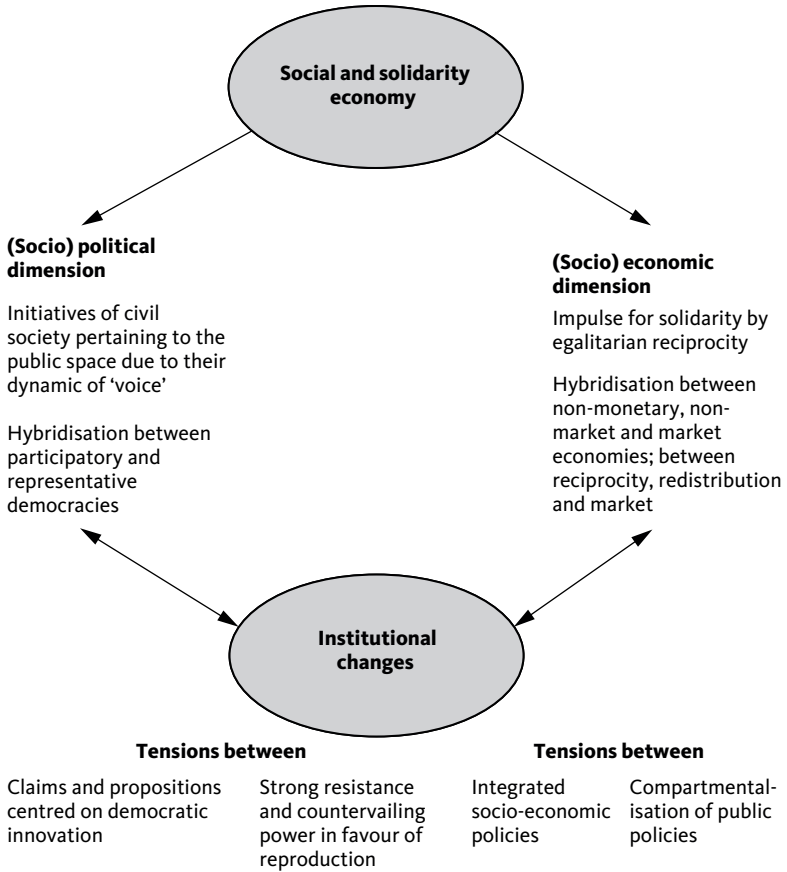
In democratic solidarity, civil society was taken into account through its public space dimension; however, in the philanthropic solidarity approach, civil society occupies the space of private free initiative according to a liberal tradition. This second version considers the market as an economic expression of civil society and warns of the risks inherent in public interference. This praise of civil society, which is defined as a defence against public intrusion, is shown in the recommendations of international financial organisations about good governance. At the national level, to cite only one example, the English project of 'social impact bonds' finds its place in the 'Big Society' highlighted by a government that advocates proximity solutions provided by civil society as alternatives to state intervention. Born in the 1970s, this school of thought opposes public bureaucracy and the independent private sector, which includes both enterprises and non-profit organisations. Socially oriented private initiatives are expected to work together and cohere, as is proposed by the social business, venture philanthropy and 'bottom of the pyramid' models. However, this resembles the narrow conception of philanthropic solidarity referred to earlier in this chapter, which defined the social question in terms of the fight against poverty and assumed that voluntary social action was key for improving the fate of the poorest. In a nutshell, it prefers individual engagement and ethical awareness over norms emanating from public authorities and political questions.

Conclusion: towards democratic solidarity

The vital challenge for the future is to envisage a reciprocal democratisation of civil society and public authorities (Cohen and Arato 1994). The democratic state will regain legitimacy only if it integrates possibilities for increased participation by salaried workers and users and if it is supported by forms of associative activity influenced by democratic solidarity. The state is responsible for facilitating voluntary commitment, which is an expression of this democratic solidarity. The social state promised an idea of solidarity focused on individual rights and redistribution, but, while it remains necessary, this conception is not sufficient. It also needs to encompass the promotion of common goods and social relations based on respect for the principles of freedom and equality. This cross-fertilisation of public action and civil society by means of a common reference to the democratic society has to be the main conduit for strengthening solidarity.

The dual dimension – political and economic – demanded by the solidarity economy and represented schematically in the diagram overleaf (Figure 1.1) underlines the need for associative, cooperative and mutualist experiments to influence institutional commitments. The focus on the organisational aspect of the social economy has not been able to counter the institutional isomorphism created by the division of, and complementarity between, the market and the welfare state. Furthermore, the focus on the economic success of the enterprises that comprise social economy has sidelined political mediations. Indeed, as a reaction to the perverse effects of that focus on the economic dimension, the solidarity economy experiments of the last decades have reinforced the political dimension of initiatives that aim to be both citizen-oriented and entrepreneurial. These will have no effect if they are unable to promote democracy in both their internal functioning and their external expression.

If we admit that the economic success of isolated experiences is not decisive, we have to reflect on the reasons why such experiences encounter so many obstacles to their diffusion. In this respect, there must be a dominant definition of the economy that discriminates against them. If SSE has no right to full existence, this is due less to inadequacy on the part of its actors and more – and fundamentally – to its relative marginalisation in the configuration of economic and political forces. Through its dual dimension, SSE questions the



1.1 The dimensions of SSE

categories of the economy at the conceptual and empirical level, refusing to limit economic phenomena to those that are defined as such by economic orthodoxy. It also questions this power of delimitation possessed by neoclassical economic science and fosters a more general interdisciplinary reflection on the definition and institutions of the economy (Granovetter 1985). Such a questioning gives rise to powerful forms of resistance and discrimination from both state and market actors. Understanding the conditions that allow SSE actors to overcome such constraints is key for understanding the scope for scaling up this form of democratic solidarity.