

THE PUBLIC SECTOR AND THE SOCIAL ECONOMY IN THE ANNALS (1975–2007): TOWARDS A NEW PARADIGM¹

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Introduction

When the *Annals of Collective Economy* became the *Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics* in 1974, it incorporated the term ‘social economy’ into its French title (*Annales de l’économie publique, sociale et coopérative*), even though the social economy had not yet gained recognition in any country, not even France. Although the public enterprise and public services sectors emerged as the principal sector conveying the general interest, the social economy did not yet constitute a recognized ‘third sector’, despite that fact that mutual societies, cooperatives and associations had existed for over a hundred years. Three decades later, the issue of general interest – and that of the State as its principal architect – would be raised in other ways. This long period was marked by crisis and change in various Nation-States, and in geopolitics throughout the world, with the emergence of regional blocs, including the European Union, and more recently with the economic rise of China and India. Thus, to a significant extent, States were re-engineered, both in terms of the division of skills through globalization and decentralization and in their core function, especially their methods for intervening and regulating the economy and society (Lévesque 2003). Many public enterprises had to

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open up to competition, as did several large cooperatives and mutual societies, while numerous cooperatives and associations emerged – principally in social services, local development, job creation and labour market integration, and fair trade. In addition, there was a growing trend toward privatization, demutualization and even decooperativization. While the State is still one of the principal participants in defining general interest, it is no longer the only one, since other ‘solidarity perimeters’ have now established themselves (Monnier and Thiry 1997). Thus, economic and political entities, have become more complex, more interdependent and more hesitant in confronting global challenges such as global warming, security and, more broadly, sustainable development.

With the above factors in mind, we analysed the content of the *Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics*, for the period 1975–2007, in the light of activities that fall within the domain of general interest. To this end, we compiled a list of 728 articles published in the 132 issues that were published in this period (see Table 1). As part of the research, we targeted primarily the following fields: public enterprises and public services; mixed enterprises and regulated private enterprises; and the third sector, though from the standpoint of the social economy and non-profit organizations (NPOs). We then identified the principal research issues and widely-used theoretical frameworks. We will cite authors whose articles seemed significant in terms of these research objectives, though we were not able to conduct an exhaustive examination of them. In addition, the editorial policy of the *Annals* is the responsibility of independent scientific boards. Consequently, the content of the various articles in the present journal does not necessarily reflect the viewpoints of CIRIEC, the scholarly association sponsoring the journal. The specific area of interest of CIRIEC and the *Annals* is not simply the public economy, the social economy and the cooperative economy, but also their mutual relationships as established through their respective contribution to the general interest. These relationships,

Table 1 – Articles dealing with the public sector and third sector (social economy and NPOs)

	Public sector (%)	Third sector (%)	Total (%)
1975–1985	75.4	24.6	100 (207)
1986–1996	55.9	44.1	100 (267)
1997–2007	44.1	55.9	100 (254)
Total	57.6	42.4	100 (728)

which are systematic and based on the institutional arrangements of each country, give rise to questions that are common to these sectors, thus creating transversal analyses that are considered from the standpoint of general interest. Lastly, the researchers hail from a wide variety of theoretical backgrounds, which is advantageous when dealing with a field as broad and complex as the one at hand.

The present article is divided into two main parts. The first deals with public enterprises and public services, while the second deals with the third sector, which is discussed from the vantage point of the social economy (cooperatives, mutual societies, manager associations) and NPOs (mainly non-profit associations and foundations). As Table 1 indicates, for the three decades as a whole 57.6% of the articles dealt with the public sector and 42.4% with the third sector. While the public sector clearly dominated during the first decade, with 75.4% of the articles, the third sector dominated in the last decade, with 55.9% of the articles. For these two major sectors, we will select the following dimensions: the context, the definition of organizations, the main theoretical approaches employed by the researchers and the major research themes. By proceeding in this way, will we be in a position to delineate the major changes and outline the principal questions raised within the two major groups. To conclude, we will try to identify their points of convergence, in terms of general interest and transversal questions, to see if the hypothesis of a new paradigm advanced in this journal in 1997 has been confirmed (Monnier and Thiry 1997).

1 The public enterprises and public services sector

To ensure it coheres with the section devoted to the third sector, we have decided to limit this first section to public enterprises and public services. Thus, we have excluded from our analysis articles dealing with several public sector issues such as public finance, public administration and even certain public policies.

1.1 The public enterprises and public services environment

Since 1975, the roles, structures and missions of the public sector, and especially those of public enterprises, have changed significantly. Until the 1970s, a Keynesian policy environment of

macroeconomic intervention dominated, and public enterprises played a strategic role as instruments in implementing the objectives of these policies. In addition, public sector growth was able to redress the market failures and protect national interests.

The stagflation of 1974–1975 cast doubt on the relevance of Keynesian policies (Aharoni 1976 and Androsch 1977). The concept of State's failures grew under the influence of alternative theoretical currents, such as monetarism and public choice. By the early 1980s, the paradigm was changing from State interventionism to supply-side, neo-classical policy. The period then saw the development of liberalization policies, deregulation of areas shielded from competition and much privatization. Classic public enterprises were transformed into mixed enterprises (Bédard, Tereraho and Bernier 1998, Bognetti and Robotti 2007) or regulated private enterprises (Cox 1999). Following the privatizations, it was considered appropriate to introduce public service missions. Thus, private or privatized enterprises could be legally compelled to provide general interest or universal services. Also, new forms of public-private partnerships were developed (O'Toole 1984, Anheier and Ben-Ner 1997), especially through delegation of public services. In Europe, the Single Market policy accentuated this trend.

1.2 Defining public enterprises

From reading articles in an international journal such as the *Annals* over thirty years, it appears that only a broad definition of the classic public enterprise can be retained. Drawing on a definition suggested by Thiry (2002), we will not select the activity criterion, be it a purely commercial activity or an activity with public service obligations; similarly, in formulating our definition we will not select as a criterion legal status in the strict sense, be it a classic business corporation, a cooperative or an enterprise with a special status. The criterion usually selected is that of majority control by governments, whether the latter intervene individually or jointly, directly or indirectly, and regardless of whether control is wielded by those holding most of the share capital or most of the votes at the annual general meeting, or even by those in a majority position in the administrative body. While this definition of a public enterprise may seem broad, it does not encompass all companies with public participation. Minority participations held by governments are common, whether they involve partial

privatization or new investments intended for consolidation or growth. Furthermore, certain otherwise totally private enterprises have been subject to government regulation or a ‘golden share’, which may involve government pre-approval for certain strategic decisions, such as transferring a significant proportion of the share capital or selling certain assets or subsidiaries. Thus, in addition to public enterprises, there is a mixed (public-private) sector, which has grown so much that the public enterprise sector has become highly heterogeneous. The articles compiled reveal a clear difference between, on the one hand, enterprises that function in competitive sectors where the public service mission is absent and, on the other hand, those where it is present. Regardless of the approach of these articles, all of them reveal that over the last three decades the sector has undergone major transformations.

Public enterprises with a totally industrial or commercial vocation

In the case of public enterprises that have a totally industrial or commercial vocation, public sector investment is often linked to market failure. The latter is not manifested in the way economists define failure² but, rather, in terms of the private initiative and capital involved. This is what prompted European States to revive the steel industry in the years between 1970 and 1980 (Quaden 1980). The presence of public funds together with private funds reduces the risks assumed by private partners, and publicly owned capital facilitates support for industrial and commercial activities. When they work together in this way, the public partner – even when it is a majority shareholder – often has only a secondary role. The industrial operator is often the private partner, while the public partner must be content with a monitoring role, though it may at times have a say in strategic decisions. Of course, the difficulty with this resides in the effectiveness of the monitoring and the demarcation between what comes under management (the sphere of the private operator) and what comes under strategy (the sphere where there is input from all partners, both private and public). Questions may also arise concerning the role of the board of directors, its composition and power, and various governance issues; these issues involve both public and private enterprises.

2 On the other hand, market failures account for the hard-core public service enterprises. See *infra*.

In this totally industrial and commercial sphere, public authorities more often than not pursue a modest industrial policy geared towards economic development and social and territorial cohesion. In Europe, a variety of mechanisms control government financial investment in industrial and commercial enterprises. In particular, they forbid governments from treating their own enterprises more favourably than private enterprises or enterprises belonging to other levels of government. Thus, from the moment public authorities invest in enterprise capital – in situations where a private investor operating in normal market economy conditions would not – there is State aid; while not all State aid is routinely criticized, conditions for financial support are severe and restrictive (Monnier 1995).

Public enterprises providing public services

Many of the articles are devoted to public enterprises active in the following sectors: energy, water, mail service, telecommunications and transport, that is, what the Anglo-Saxon world often refers to as public utilities. They also discuss recent trends in these enterprises, and this will be examined in detail in Section 1.3. Historically, these enterprises have been characterized by one or several market failures: (i) the fact that they provide a commodity or service of the public or collective type (non-exclusion and non-rivalry); (ii) extensive informational asymmetries; (iii) significant returns to scale or economies of scope, in extreme cases involving a so-called natural monopoly, significant externalities (positive or negative) and/or club effects and (iv) considerations of security, the long term and future generations, etc. (Glachant 1995).

In Europe, the methods for structuring these sectors were greatly modified; they were impelled especially by the Commission concerned by increased integration of domestic markets. However, other factors too played a role here: the increase in world trade, technological shocks, consumers' desire to meet their needs more effectively and pressure from private enterprises, some of which were keen to gain access to activities that were results-oriented and characterized by moderate risk, others looking to obtain good-quality, low-priced basic inputs to raise their competitiveness.

Both types of enterprises merit examination. In the European Union alone,³ following a steep rise in the 1970s and early 1980s,

3 For studies related to public enterprises in North America and Latin America, see Aharoni (1983) and Pick (1983).

the relative role played by the public enterprise sector reached a peak around 1982, followed by an almost constant decline.⁴ While the decline in its relative role over the last twenty years may be attributed essentially to various privatization programmes, the increase observed between 1973 and 1982 was due as much to doctrinal decisions (such as the French government's nationalizations under Mauroy in 1981 and 1982) as to pragmatic considerations such as rescue plans for sectors in difficulty (such as the steel industry).

1.3 Main themes involving public enterprises

Table 2 presents trends in the main themes involving public enterprises and public services, as discussed over the last three decades in the *Annals*. Analysis of the 266 articles dealing with these issues reveals a shift in research on the macro-economic objectives of public enterprises (32.8% in 1975–1985 and 0% in the other periods) towards an examination of the objective of technical efficiency and cost efficiency (4.7% in 1975–1985 and 28.1% in 1986–1996). Studies on privatization processes increased in the second period 1986–1996, with 32.1% of the articles, and remained very significant during the last period (22.2%). The set of problems related to regulation appeared during the 1986–1996 period and had 9.7% of the articles; their number increased greatly in the last period, accounting for 35.4% of the articles. Note, too, that many of the articles dealt with other issues related to public enterprises. They will not be analysed in detail, but are grouped together in Table 2 under 'Miscellaneous'. Topics in the latter category include financing, setting of prices, cost structure, location, marketing and the training of public- and mixed-enterprise managers. The latter category of articles, which also contains descriptive analyses by sector and country, decreased over time from 57.8% in 1975–1985 to 14.1% during the latter period.

An inventory of all the journal's articles dealing broadly with the public sector over the last three decades reveals they numbered 375. The 109 articles not classified in Table 2 and that are not specifically examined in the present article range from topics connected to planning, public finance (criteria required by the Maastricht Treaty,

4 Based on statistics provided by the European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation and of Enterprises of General Economic Interest (CEEP), the EC share was 13.7% in 1971, 16.6% in 1982, 11.8% in 1991 and 9% in 1998. Of course, the number of countries involved has changed over time.

Table 2 – Articles on public enterprises and public services

	Macro-economic objectives (%)	Technical and cost efficiency (%)	Privatization (%)	Regulation (%)	Delegation of public services (%)	Miscellaneous (%)	Total
1975–1985	32.8	4.7	3.1	1.6	0	57.8	100% (64)
1986–1996	0	28.1	32.1	9.7	0	30.1	100% (103)
1997–2007	0	10.1	22.2	35.4	18.2	14.1	100% (99)
1975–2007	7.9	15.9	21.4	17.3	6.7	30.8	100% (266)

regressive taxes, etc.) and welfare systems (in the areas of health and retirement) to various public policies conducted in the fields of employment, price stability, research and development, housing and even support for the social economy. Other topics, including the rate of return on public investment, wage determination or the role of public administration often figure in more than one article.

The five topics selected, namely, effectiveness, the liberalization and privatization processes, the new forms of regulation, the general interest missions and the problem of delegating public services have been analysed below in detail. The emergence and development of these research topics are linked not only to new currents of economic thought (Section 1.4) but also – at the supranational level – to the policies of European authorities.

Effectiveness

Among the recurring themes in the journal, we find definitions and measures of effectiveness. The effectiveness and performance of an enterprise is defined as the degree to which the objectives assigned to it by its owners can be reached. The objectives of the private enterprise owners come down in large measure to a single objective, profit maximization. The objectives of public enterprises are more numerous and may be presented as follows (Thiry 1993).

The allocation objective has been studied in numerous publications. It refers to efficiency in resource allocation. This objective encompasses different aspects (Tulkens 1986): technical efficiency, which consists in the ability of the enterprise to create its output with a minimum of resources (Deprins and Simar 1989); cost efficiency, which refers to the ability to create the output at the least cost (Filippini et al. 1992); allocative efficiency, which involves determining the production volume and the output price, and which

in principle requires that the price equal the marginal cost of production (Marchand and Tulkens 1979).

Then there are redistributive objectives. The public enterprise may decide to provide its services or charge certain prices for the purposes of redistribution among individuals, or even among regions, particularly via price perequation systems. For a long time, public enterprises also assisted governments in their macroeconomic policies (combating inflation and unemployment) (Pestieau 1984), in their pursuit of economic growth and in making their balance of payments viable. Governments can also entrust their enterprises with economic development and industrial policy missions. The trend since the late 1970s reflects a diminished role for direct policies, such as public funding and public procurement (Jeanrenaud 1984), and even sector policies. Today, this role has been revived by the European Union, through research support programmes and structural funds. Public enterprises are also involved in environmental protection and land-use planning policies, in the protection of people's savings and in maintaining control over strategic decisions in certain sectors functioning at the national or regional level. It can also provide workers with better working conditions, or even increased participation in managing an enterprise. In their capacity as socially aware enterprises and vehicles for social cohesion, we once again note their objective of facilitating occupational integration.

Liberalization and privatization

As explained above, since 1975 the framework for public enterprises has changed a great deal. The frequently used term 'deregulation' does not adequately describe what came about. It would be more accurate to say that there was an adjustment: new forms of regulation replaced those that had existed until the 1980s. By contrast, the term 'liberalization' seems more appropriate: opportunities for entry were improved and barriers to entry were reduced considerably. Above all, monopolies were either abolished or reduced to a minimum, that is, limited to the core infrastructures of networks forming natural monopolies⁵ or to what was temporarily acceptable to ensure the financing of non-profitable sections of industries. In this way, competition was greatly stimulated and the number of operators increased.

5 Such as rail transit, natural gas transportation and distribution systems and electrical transmission grids.

Liberalization processes were often accompanied by privatization, which constitutes another major theme of the journal. Thiemeyer (1986) provided more than 15 different explanations for privatization. Thiry (1994) defines privatization as the total or partial transfer of an enterprise to the private sector; the transfer can either be remunerated or be free of charge (Markou and Waddams 1999, Reeves and Palcic 2004). For Thiry, the French term, *dénationalisation*, is inadequate since it does not apply to local or regional public sectors, which, for their part, may also be subject to privatization. The term *désétatisation* leads to a confusion between modification of property rights and reduction in State regulation. In addition, the author demonstrates that privatization cannot be reduced to changes in the status, structure or management regime of public enterprises. These changes may occur prior to privatization, though they may also constitute an alternative to it, aiming to increase management independence and effectiveness without resorting to private interests or operators.

Numerous articles have examined the reasons for privatization. Thiry (1994) differentiates amongst these reasons: ideological and doctrinal; economic efficiency and effectiveness; the financial requirements of public enterprises that cannot be met due to a lack of State funding; and development needs, especially in international cooperation among operators. The Community rules on public enterprises, established within the framework that created the Single European Market (SEM), accelerated the trend toward privatization. In central and eastern Europe, the introduction of a decentralized market economy led to much privatization (Estrin 1991, Ben-Ner 1993, Jones and Mygind 2000). Several articles and thematic issues of the *Annals* also discussed the problem of privatization in developing countries (Heald 1992, Cook and Minogue 2002, Sciandra 2005).

Regulation

Liberalization and privatization, especially in sectors involving public service missions, have come to require stronger regulation and a greater role for the regulatory State (Cox 1999, Bance 1999). Many of the articles examined this trend. The new modes of regulation (Varone and Genoud 2001, Kassim and Waddams Price 2005) initiated in these sectors have the following characteristics:

- (1) They separate production activities from regulatory missions. Even when the State keeps its responsibilities in the area of

- production (relating to its holdings in the enterprises involved), it must separate its role as a producer-shareholder from that of regulator; consequently, the regulatory bodies (competition agencies and sector regulators) must have a degree of independence from the State;
- (2) They separate economic activities controlled by monopolies from those operating within a competitive framework (at least in book-keeping, but most often organically as well). They ban cross-subsidization, a practice giving certain enterprises (in competitive markets) a competitive advantage, and allowing monopolistic activities to dominate in the area of costs and profitability (Heald 1997);
 - (3) They provide market actors with transparent and non-discriminatory access to essential facilities, that is, to basic networks, which remain, more often than not, in a monopolistic position;
 - (4) There is transparency in financial relationships between governments and their enterprises to ensure that there is no government assistance hampering the free play of competition;
 - (5) They clarify general interest missions and public service obligations and require transparency in their implementation.

General interest missions and the delegation of public services

All of these changes place governments and their enterprises in a situation differing totally from that of the 1980s. Gone is the era in which it was enough for the State to entrust an enterprise or a State or municipal services company with an activity subject to the general rules for public services (continuity, equality, adaptability and security), or to impose constraints that were flexible when it came to financing an activity performed according to the general interest. Governments have begun to take greater responsibility in matters of public service obligations (Fournier 1996). It should be pointed out that there has never been perfect harmony between public enterprises and economic activities subject to public service obligations. As noted above, some enterprises with public participation provide no public services; conversely, some public services were performed by private enterprises even before the privatization waves of the 1980s and 1990s.

The articles in the journal reveal that, more than ever before, governments are taking charge of public service missions. They are also defining and financing them, and monitoring their implemen-

tation. Given this trend, the European Commission has introduced the concept of 'services of general interest'. The field encompassing missions of 'general interest' and public service is broader than that of universal service missions or obligations (Cremer, Gasmi, Grimaud and Lafont 2001), a minimal concept developed by the Commission and particularly relevant in telecommunications. Universal service is defined as a minimal group of services of a specific quality to which all users and consumers have access at an affordable price. Universal services do not go as far as general interest or public service missions; they do not concern all the network sectors, such as the gas or public-transport sectors. The universal services concept is progressive and has the potential for new applications in the bank, insurance and other sectors.

Depending on the specific characteristics of the sector involved, general interest or public service missions and obligations can have several objectives. These include, amongst others:

- (1) Overall economic efficiency, that is, correcting market failures: taking externalities into account, correcting the inefficiencies that stem from natural or other monopolies, guaranteeing security of supply, long-term planning, etc.;
- (2) Environmental protection, land-use planning, meeting specific national needs in terms of defence, and protecting cultural specificity;
- (3) Redistribution amongst individuals or regions aiming at notably implementing and maintaining networks and (economic) activity throughout the country; preferential tariffs for certain categories of consumers (the disabled, the elderly, large families, etc.); the obligation to provide minimal service, or even the so-called price perequation system, which generally involves the mechanism of cross-subsidization between the profitable and unprofitable parts of the same activity. Perequation can be social (no differentiation on the basis of consumer income) or geographic (no differentiation on the basis of location).

The operator in charge may also have public service obligations, and governments must establish a form of coverage for the supplementary cost this entails. It may involve cross-subsidization, annual subsidies from public authorities, preferential tax treatment or payroll tax relief, negative bids in which the operator in charge of the service is the one who applies for the lowest subsidy, a sector-based financing system (for example, via public service funds or a universal service to which all operators in the sector contribute, whether or not they take on public service obligations).

Lastly, another current research topic that has appeared in many of the journal's articles is that of delegating public services (Cox 2003, Staropoli and Yvrande 2006). Contracting methods employed within the framework of public service delegation include competitive tendering and direct allocation of a contract without call to tender (*intuitu personae*) being extended to a public enterprise or a third party. One way competitive tendering can be carried out is through awarding the contract to the highest bidder, or through a beauty contest in which the principal criterion is not the price but the quality of the service provided. In Europe, this is viewed as an instrument to facilitate the application to public services of Community law regarding opening up to competition.

1.4 Theoretical approaches

As noted previously, market failures constitute one explanation for the regulatory role of the State. Government regulation of 'public utilities' can be explained in particular by the economies of scale and scope enjoyed by natural monopolies, and by the resulting consumer protection. However, State intervention has also revealed failures that in part justify privatization and the liberalization of markets. Numerous theoretical developments provide a framework for these problems. While certain nuances apply, we can state that the *Annals* have analysed these problems primarily from the standpoint of neo-classical and neo-institutional theories. Legal science and political science have provided an analytical framework for the numerous descriptive articles. This accounts for not only their distinctive national characteristics but also for the influence of European policy on the processes of liberalization and privatization in certain sectors. In the period under study, few heterodox approaches were used in the articles dealing with the public sector. This contrasted with the treatment received by articles on the third sector.

Thus, transaction cost theory is discussed in numerous articles (Obermann 2007). While the theory at first analysed private enterprise, it was later applied to the public sector (Williamson 1999). The theory of transaction costs linked to contractual and coordination relationships attempts to determine if certain transactions can be carried out more efficiently in specific institutional environments, namely, market, hybrid or organizational relationships (vertical integration, in-house production). For example, it allows us to determine which organizational form is the most effective,

especially in providing public services. Basing its argument on the fact that contracts are, by nature, incomplete (Fares and Saussier 2001) allows it to analyse various forms of public service delegation.

Also widely employed is principal-agent theory, which is associated with asymmetric information and figures prominently in many of the articles as an analytical framework for relationships within a complex network involving the State, the regulator, enterprises, and various stakeholders and managers. Specifically, these models allow us to identify hidden information and thus define the control mechanisms and incentives that enable us to match the actions of agents with the preferences of the principal. The theory serves to demonstrate that the principal-agent relationship (in this case, stockholders-directors) can be more efficient in the private sector than in the public sector, where citizens are the owners. It is also used widely to analyse public service delegation processes (Kassim and Waddams Price 2005).

Public choice theory demonstrates that individuals in public sector organizations pursue different individual objectives, including budget maximization, to optimize their individual advantages and working conditions (Niskanen 1971). The aim of this criticism of government dysfunction, especially government bureaucracy, is to demonstrate that the State cannot guarantee the general interest. The theory of property rights, for its part, demonstrates the dominance of private property. It maintains that in private firms the incentives for improving performance are stronger – incentives that stem from the right to control and the right to residual income (Alchian 1987). In private firms, improved performance results from owners putting pressure on managers, pressure that is non-existent in public enterprises; this is due essentially to a lack of motivation on the part of public managers, who have no residual income. Consequently, some consider that public ownership will be less efficient than private ownership.

In management science, several articles turn to New Public Management (NPM) approaches, which assume there are no differences between private sector and public sector organizations. Consequently, NPM theory suggests applying market techniques to public sector organizations (Pollitt 2000). To reform the public sector, these approaches suggest for instance introducing competitive bidding (Mattisson and Thomasson 2007). Organizational theory has inspired several articles, especially as concerns evaluating the impact of privatization (Bishop and Thompson 1992).

A large number of empirical articles have compared the performance of public and private enterprises. These comparisons fall within the framework of neo-classical theory and are generally based on the measurement of productive efficiency, that is, technical efficiency and cost efficiency. The methods used to measure efficiency are numerous and based on econometric models (Farsi, Filippini and Greene 2006), or make use of a nonparametric approach to determining frontiers (Data Envelopment Analysis) (Doble 1995). Regulators also use these measurements of efficiency to define regulation mechanisms (Estache, Perelman and Trujillo 2007).

2 The third sector: the social economy and non-profit organizations (NPOs)

The articles that deal with the third sector,⁶ and that delimit this sector according to social economy or NPO parameters, account for 308 of the 728 articles (42.4%) published between 1975 and 2007 (see Table 1). The percentage increased from 24.6% of the articles in the first decade to 53.6% in the last decade, clearly revealing the scope of changes that came about with recognition of the social economy and the rise of non-profit organizations. This increase in articles on the third sector did not take place at the expense of those on cooperatives, since studies involving the latter increased from 45 articles in the first decade to 69 in the latter decade (which, nevertheless, saw a relative decline in cooperatives in the third sector). The social economy as a concept comprising a variety of third sector components did not appear in the journal until 1983, while the first article on the NPO concept did not appear until 1987. If we limit our examination to articles with a significant theoretical dimension, then the articles guided explicitly by social economy principles (11.7%) are less numerous than those based on NPO parameters (18.1%). However, the expression ‘social economy’ arises much more frequently, as we can see from the proportion of articles dealing with cooperatives and mutual societies.

2.1 The third sector context

As occurred in the case of public enterprises, the third sector context underwent a profound transformation. The *Annals* provided

6 The third sector in the sense employed by Mertens (1999) following in the footsteps of Gui (1991). See *infra*.

Table 3 – Articles on the third sector: social economy and NPOs

	Social economy criteria (%)	NPO criteria (%)	Cooperatives or mutual societies* (%)	Miscellaneous (%)	Total
1975–1985	3.9	–	88.2	7.9	100% (51)
1986–1996	5.2	19.2	66.9	8.7	100% (115)
1997–2007	19.7	23.9	48.6	7.8	100% (142)
1975–2007	11.7%(36)	18.1%(56)	62.1%(191)	8.1%(25)	100% (308)

* Includes self-managing enterprises and workers' co-operatives.

explanations for three major transformations. First, non-profit associations grew continuously following the Second World War, especially in nations where civil society had a voice. Until the 1970s, associations remained a marginal social force, but in the next few decades they became 'a major economic force in industrial nations', sometimes accounting for 10 per cent or more of the active labour force. Thus, in France, Germany and the United States, they 'contributed more to growth in employment in the 1980s than any other economic sector' (Ben-Ner and Anheier 1997: 336). In the United States, associations and the foundations that supported them, alone constituted a sector that tended to organize itself as such, that of Non-profit Organizations (NPOs). With the decline in funding from governments, these associations increasingly developed business activities, so that in certain cases they became 'social enterprises' (Borzaga and Defourny 2001, Nyssens 2006a).

Second, the situation among cooperatives over the last three decades has evolved, following a double trend: a difficult period for the majority of entrenched cooperatives and a period of strong growth for new cooperatives (Fernandez 2006). In the first case, the forms of governance and property associated with a significant number of mature cooperatives became commonplace. One might even dub this trend 'coopitalism'. However, the most important aspect of this trend was that these forms of governance and property were transformed, particularly to meet the challenge of market liberalization (Nilsson 1994, Bagar 1994). While some sectors, such as loan and credit cooperatives, fared relatively well (McKillop 2005), others, such as the consumption sector and mutual societies, underwent de-cooperativization and demutualization, especially in the United Kingdom, Australia and Austria (Chaddad and Cook 2004, Birchall 2000: 30, Greinke 2005, Schediwy 1995). As concerns the new generation of

cooperatives, they were created in new sectors that often fell within the exclusive jurisdiction of the State, such as social services, social integration and local development (Lorendahl 1997, Richez-Battesti and Gianfaldoni 2005). In addition, they gave rise, to a new category of cooperatives, social cooperatives, which are not markedly different from associations (Borzaga 1996). Thus, certain observers maintain that ‘while the form of cooperation bequeathed by the 20th century is largely dominated by its economic sector, its significance in the future, if not its very existence, could well be shaped by the social sector’ (Chomel and Vienney 1996: 663).

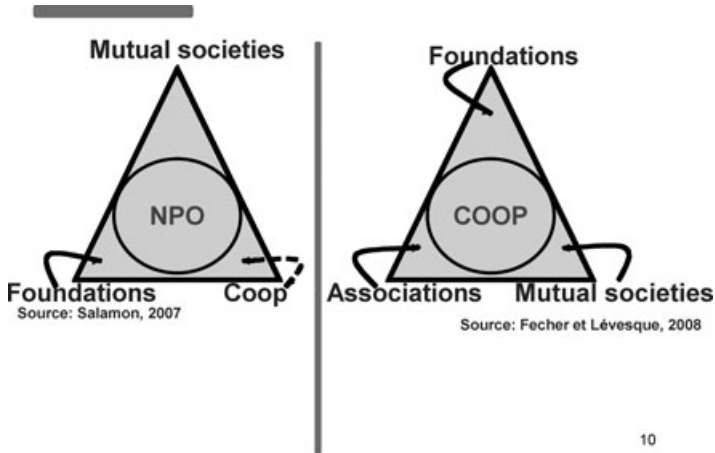
Lastly, recognition of the social economy, which occurred in the second half of the 1970s, reveals a reversal of the trend in relationships among cooperatives, mutual societies and associations. Centripetal forces gradually came to dominate centrifugal forces, with the result that a concept emerged, that of social economy, apt to unite them under a new category (Manoa, Rault and Vienney 1992). The term ‘reversal of the trend’ is not an exaggeration, since ‘from 1960 to 1970 no one imagined that cooperatives or mutual societies might have something in common, and even less that these movements might be appropriate vehicles for transforming society’ (Rocard 2006: 7). The trend reversal did not occur in every European country, nor did it occur everywhere at the same speed (CIRIEC 2006). In Germany, where there is no tradition of collaboration among cooperatives, mutual societies and voluntary associations that provide cultural, social and health services, the expressions ‘social economy’ and ‘third sector’ are still largely unknown (Münkner 1994).

2.2 Defining the third sector according to social economy and NPO criteria

As indicated, the third sector may be defined on the basis of either social economy or NPO criteria. From the social economy perspective, there are two ways of defining it: the first delimits its field using legal and institutional forms of organization (cooperatives, mutual societies, associations, foundations); the second extends the first definition by including principles and features common to these various statuses. This means including the purpose of services provided to members or the community rather than profit, managerial autonomy, democratic control by its members, and the primacy of individuals and project over capital when distributing surpluses

(Defourny 2006). The second definition tends to dominate since different countries define legal status differently. Thus, Italy has its own definition of associations; Belgium, where the legal status is not very restrictive, has its own definition of cooperatives. Then there are Denmark and the United Kingdom, which have no laws concerning cooperatives. All countries have a common problem: the association status does clearly differentiate between associations that engage in economic activities from those that do not. Lastly, governments, which have recognized the social economy, have adopted institutional definitions that vary according to political influences and conceptions. Ultimately, there is no universally accepted institutional definition of the social economy. Aside from the articles of the pioneers (Desroche 1983, Vienney 1994), CIRIEC's International Commission on the Social Economy initiated a forum for this type of discussion in the early 1990s (Defourny and Monzon 1992). However, since then it has not generated similar discussion, at least not in the *Annals*.

The NPO approach to the third sector, as discussed by Salamon (Salamon et al. 2000) proliferated widely at the international level, particularly due to the creation of satellite accounts for non-profit associations. The latter are defined according to the following principles: organizational formality, managerial autonomy, non-distribution of profits to members, private and nongovernmental in basic structure, voluntary to some meaningful extent, and therefore likely to engage people on the basis of some shared interest or concern. Its most distinctive aspect is 'the constraint of non-distribution of profits'. More specifically, NPOs may be defined as 'coalitions of individuals who associate to provide themselves and others with goods or services that are not adequately supplied by either for-profit or government organizations' (Ben-Ner and Van Hoomissen 1991: 521). NPOs are primarily organizations in which the principal (donors and managers) directs their services or products toward third parties (beneficiaries). From this perspective, beneficiaries have no control (and are thus passive). Since the emphasis here is placed on NPOs supported through donations, rather than through commercial activities, those who apply to form these associations are those who sponsor the production of consumed goods by other individuals (ibid: 523). Thus, only associations oriented toward meeting the needs of a third party can be categorized as serving the general interest (Gui 1991). Researchers, especially in continental Europe, have raised many criticisms of the NPO-based definition of the third sector (Evers and Laville 2004, Lorendahl 1997, Wijkström 1997).



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Figure 1 – Two frameworks for the third sector: NPO and Social Economy

While in both instances it is possible to refer to the third sector or even the social economy,⁷ there are considerable differences between the two frameworks. First, NPO-based criteria place the non-profit organization at the centre of their field of study, whereas social economy criteria tend to turn the cooperative into an ideal-type relative to the other components, owing to the formalization of its values in institutional rules. Second, the principle corresponding to the general interest is, in the one instance, the constraint of non-distribution of profits and, in the other, democratic management and the principle of providing service to members; this refers to different definitions of the non-profit-making status (Desmoustier 2001, Nyssens 2006b). Third, the NPO-based guidelines exclude most cooperative and mutual societies, whereas social economy criteria exclude some associations, particularly those not engaged in economic activity. Fourth, NPO-based criteria are very concerned about dependence on the State (despite the fact that many associations are highly dependent on it), whereas those of the social economy count on ‘self help’ and are critical of dependence on philanthropy, especially of the type managed by large corporations and churches. Lastly, the

⁷ In his presentation at the First International CIRIEC Conference on the Social Economy, in Victoria (British Columbia, Canada), Salamon suggested representing the social economy as a triangle, with non-profit associations at the centre, and foundations, cooperatives and mutual societies each occupying a corner (Salamon 2007).

contribution of cooperatives is most likely under-estimated in the Anglo-Saxon world, where there is an emphasis on NPO criteria, whereas that of associations would be under-estimated in countries where the social economy is the point of reference (Mertens 1999).

2.3 Theoretical approaches to the social economy and NPOs

Even though some of the articles dealt simultaneously with NPOs and the social economy, we will deal first with the approaches based on social economy criteria and then with those of NPOs.

Theoretical approaches mobilized by the social economy and cooperatives

When broaching the theoretical aspects of the social economy, the works of Vienney (1994 and 1982) are required reading in the French-language literature on the subject. To define the social economy, he draws inspiration from both Marx, regarding its emergence, and Walras, regarding the production function. In Vienney's view, the social economy enterprise is defined as the combination of a group of individuals and an enterprise. It is based on an economic relationship (an enterprise) and a membership relationship (a grouping together of individuals) whose operationalization requires cooperative rules (with the required adaptations for non-profit organizations). Thus, the social economy may be analysed using three major dimensions: (i) more or less dominated actors, (ii) activities that are necessary, but either have not been fulfilled or have been poorly fulfilled by the market or the State, and (iii) rules adapted to the needs of organizations combining the economic relationship with the membership relationship. This framework opens up the scope of the research to both sociological and economic analysis.

Recent theoretical work has been concerned with emerging initiatives viewed as innovative, such as the concept of the solidarity-based economy (Laville 1994) and the social enterprise. Such initiatives have appeared in the journal but are few in number. The solidarity-based economy, whose prime interest has been proximity services (Petrella 2001), takes its inspiration from Polanyi and defines the economy from a substantive standpoint, that is, in reference to activities associated with the production and consumption of goods or services. Referring to economic sociology by way of the concepts of solidarity and networks (Polanyi and Granovetter), and

to political sociology via the concept of the public sphere (Habermas), this theoretical construction reveals both the social and political embeddedness of proximity services (Dacheux and Laville 2003). Similarly, the social enterprise is defined as having two dimensions, an economic dimension and a social dimension. Their criteria in large measure resemble those employed in defining the social economy and NPOs.

Heterodox approaches, too, have been mobilized, especially those that deal with conventions (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991) for characterizing action logics, and organization methods characterizing the social economy and associations (Enjolras 2004 and 1995). For these approaches, most economic activities fall within the remit not only of the market sphere, but also the industrial sphere (efficiency), the civic sphere (the public good) and the domestic sphere (reciprocity). In addition, owing to their forms of governance and ownership, associations and more generally the social economy may be defined 'as a mechanism for compromise designed to manage the tensions among several forms of organization, and involving market, domestic, solidarity-based, administrative and democratic forms of organization' (Enjolras 1994: 94). In this view, the social economy may be analysed employing different disciplines, such as the socio-economic approach (Laville 2003, Michelsen 1994, Enjolras 1995, Spear 2000), management sciences (Bouchard 2005, Chaves and Sajardo-Moreno 2004, Malo and Vézina 2004), institutionalism (Chaves 2002, Bernier, Bouchard and Lévesque 2003), law (Münkner 1994), history (Levasseur and Rousseau 1992) and, of course, economic thought (Demoustier and Rousselière 2005).

In the field of management, several theoretical approaches have been used to explain governance. The authors of a thematic issue on governance in the social economy (Chaves, Cornforth, Schediwy and Spear 2004) mobilized the various theories used in the private sector, but as the same time endeavoured to broaden and enrich them. Thus, Cornforth (2004) examined the principle theoretical approaches for analysing governance (agency theory, stewardship theory, a democratic perspective, stakeholder theory, resource dependency theory and managerial hegemony theory), revealing the dimensions of complexity and the tensions that characterize the organization of the social economy.

Lastly, the journal contains articles employing the neo-classical approach to deal with studies on cooperatives and mutual societies. However, there are no articles employing this approach to deal specifically with the social economy concept. Aside from agency

theory (Jensen and Merckling 1976), which we have just discussed, neo-institutionalist theory on transaction costs (Williamson 1985) is often used both to validate the advantage afforded by cooperatives or mutual societies (such as the reduction in transaction costs based on the trust established by cooperative rules) and to reveal its weak points (transaction costs resulting from property rights and participatory operations). Finally, there are the numerous studies on the performance of cooperatives and mutual societies that make use of econometrics.

Theoretical approaches mobilized to study NPOs

The theoretical approaches employed in analysing NPOs are primarily neo-classical and, less frequently, heterodox. Thus, the dominant research is primarily micro-economic and relies almost exclusively on rational action (Ben-Ner and Van Hoomissen 1991: 521). To explain the existence of non-profit organizations, the analyses resort to market failures (Hansmann 1980), government failures, especially for heterogeneous demands (Weisbrod 1975 and 1977) and philanthropy failures due to limited resources, its specific or local characteristics or its amateurism (Salamon et al. 2000). Neo-classical theory is sometimes modified greatly to account for supply. Thus, to explain the creation of a non-profit organization by a social entrepreneur, or by the individuals making up the membership, some economists refer to rational action, ideological motives and even religious proselytizing (James and Rose-Ackerman 1986). Lastly, a few articles covering NPOs come under management science, especially those dealing with strategic analysis.

The articles on NPOs that draw on neoclassical theory have given rise to critiques identifying its limitations (Evers and Laville 2004). First, critiques outside the paradigm have demonstrated the fact that these analyses are profoundly affected by their Anglo-Saxon environment, especially since the shape of the third sector is greatly influenced by its institutional environment (Nyssens 2006: 625, Wijkstrom 1997). Second, critiques that originate from within these approaches highlight the assumptions made by these approaches, especially the fact that NPOs are analysed almost exclusively on the basis of rational action, the pursuit of individual interest and cost-benefit analysis. To better understand these organizations, 'it is necessary to begin with less simplistic assumptions about the motives of human acts than is usual in theoretical-economic literature' (Gui 1987: 632). Using the concept of relational goods, Gui proposes a

transition from an ‘exchange paradigm’ to an ‘interpersonnal relation paradigm’ which would allow us to consider the possibility of an economic dimension coexisting with a communicative or affective dimension for activities (Gui 2000). Other critiques refer to heterodox approaches, such as that regarding conventions, to extend the concept of rationality towards axiological rationality and take into account the diverse coordination methods employed by associations (Enjolras 2004). Lastly, heterodox approaches seem more open to taking into account institutional environments, and thus resemble certain socio-economic approaches.

2.4 Research topics in the social economy and NPOs

In part, the principle research topics are related to economic conditions. Consequently, it seemed appropriate to consider the three periods selected to classify the various articles. The period from 1975 to 1985 was marked by economic crisis and a calling into question of the future of organizations oriented toward the general interest; that from 1986 to 1996 by important changes, including demutualization and the breaking down of boundaries; while that from 1997 to 2007 by an affirmation of new relationships with the State, the market and civil society, as well as the ensuing new forms of governance.

The period from 1975 to 1985: economic crisis and a new questioning

The theme of economic crisis arises more or less explicitly in several articles. Sometimes its dangers are cause for anxiety; sometimes the opportunities it presents revive hope. Where it is associated with workers’ cooperatives, the self-management which asserted itself in the 1960s generated more than one third of the articles (37.2%) published in the period from 1975 to 1985. Similarly, the outlook for the future of the social economy is generally analysed in association with the public sector, sometimes from the perspective of a new mixed economy (31.3%). Lastly, a few articles discuss cooperatives in developing countries (13.7%). While these three themes account for nearly 82.2% of all the articles, the others cannot easily be grouped together since they comprise articles on a variety of cooperative sectors or specific questions, such as training or cooperative principles and doctrine.

The first theme, self-management, is analysed primarily in terms of enterprises controlled by workers (Pestieau and Quaden

1978). With the exception of the thematic issue entitled 'Self-management and Cooperation' (1978), the dominant approach is microeconomic. In this view, self-managed enterprises go beyond workers' cooperatives, even though the two types of enterprises have common concerns. Thus, several articles are devoted to challenging the theory of the degeneration of workers' cooperatives (Webb and Webb 1920, Jones 1975). From the standpoint of neo-classical theory, one of the problems with worker-controlled enterprises derives from the fact that they would rather give themselves better remuneration than invest in the enterprise. Vanek advances a theory on general equilibrium in self-management, namely, the feasibility of an equilibrium in which the maximization of the value added per worker replaces profit maximization as the enterprise objective (Steinherr 1978). This conceptualization inspired much research. However, several articles suggested a number of reasons why the results should not be treated as definitive (Hey and Suckling 1980, Hawawini and Michel 1980); at the same time, they invite researchers to get involved in empirical research (Pryor 1983). Lastly, several articles deal either with growth in these enterprises, the financing required to counter negative forces (Defourny 1983) or special support or coaching provided by local agencies (Cornforth 1984).

The second theme, the outlook for the future of the social and cooperative economy, was to some extent connected to economic crisis. Some authors maintained that the numerous experiments in the United States in the areas of employees' stock ownership, buyouts, and the creation of enterprises by workers, forecast a third stage of development in the American cooperative movement (Woodworth 1984). More generally, the economic crisis led one to suppose that the social economy should expand in step with the problems experienced by capitalism (Quaden 1982). Furthermore, 'rediscovery of the market', went hand in hand with the 'rediscovery that it was perfectly compatible with the public, social and cooperative economy' (Quaden 1978: 388). At the same time, cooperatives, mutual societies and associations in countries such as France and Spain were trying to find a common project they could name 'the social economy' (Moreau 1983, Monzon 1987). In this view, the idea of reconciling economic and social issues was for some 'the minimum that the third sector could contribute to improving the socio-economic environment of our societies' (Marée and Saive 1984). Still, does the idea of a third sector, belonging to neither private interests nor the State not suggest that the transformations will be carried out on the basis of a critique directed almost exclusively at the public economy and

public administration (Thiemeyer 1982: 355)? Do the contradictions between, on the one hand, the demands for democracy and worker participation and, on the other hand, economic structures not lead to economic and social disintegration? How should we view the convergence of the private sector with public enterprises and social economy enterprises? Would such convergence make it impossible ‘to theorize about a form of management for public enterprises and cooperatives that was structurally and necessarily different than that for private enterprises’ (Petrelli 1976: 373)? Clearly, now is the time for raising questions, since there are no pat answers.

The third theme, cooperation in developing countries, is not treated as consistently as the first two. In addition to self-management in certain Latin American countries, articles in the *Annals* have examined cooperatives as development tools (Lucius and Mitchell 1979) or as a means of countering rural-urban migration (Soulas de Russel 1984b) or avoiding famine. They give particular attention to agricultural cooperatives and cooperative banks (Taylor 1975). Given the failures, or results that are often disappointing, they raise questions about conditions for success (Van Dooren 1982), the need for adapted training (Soulas de Russel 1984a), the transfer of western models and the need for new approaches (Platteau 1984, Wignaraja 1985).

The 1986–1996 period: privatisations and experiments

Compared to the previous period, there were more than double the number of articles dealing with the third sector (115 versus 51). Four major themes stand out. The first analyses worker-managed enterprises (33.2%), the second discusses cooperatives other than workers’ cooperatives (23.8%); the third deals with non-profit organizations (20.8%) and the fourth examines demutualization (9.5%). Among other themes, we find various topics; these deal primarily with cooperatives.

First, the large number of articles on self-managed enterprises may be explained in part by the publication of two thematic issues (Thomas and Defourny 1990, Defourny 1986). The authors examined solutions offered to compensate for the weak points revealed in economic analyses, especially the aversion to investment and the weak management skills of workers. Thus, funds devoted to these enterprises, as well as the coaching provided by specialized agencies appear to have greatly favoured the emergence and growth of these enterprises (Thomas 1990). In this view, the important role played

by institutional frameworks and government support would in large measure explain differences among countries. Toward the end of this period, worker cooperatives seemed to lose their vigour, especially where there was an improvement in employment and public policy did not work in their favour (Cornforth and Thomas 1994). Lastly, employee buyouts of enterprises as a means to privatization (using purchase notes), similar to the method employed in the United Kingdom and transition countries, resulted in analyses that were generally favourable. However, these accomplishments were often considered transitory or even reversible (Wright, Thomson and Robie 1989, Filatotchev, Wright and Buck 1995, Ellerman 1990, Ben-Ner 1993).

Second, the articles on cooperatives dealt in most cases with cooperative sectors, the profiles of cooperatives in various countries (Bagar and Michelsen 1994, Lévesque 1989, Monzon 1987), major cooperatives, success stories such as Mondragon in the Basque Country and the *Caisses populaires Desjardins* in Québec and, lastly, the advantages of cooperativism (Nilsson 1996, Stryjan 1994, Bergeron and Lalancette 1993, Côté 1989). As a whole, research on cooperatives was oriented toward concrete issues such as financing, marketing and the social role of cooperatives (Nilsson 1994). The difficulties encountered by certain cooperative sectors, beginning with consumer cooperatives, were analysed as well (Schediwy 1995). Likewise, there were articles on coalitions, mergers and demutualization. Some demonstrated that isomorphism had become commonplace, whereas others revealed that it could be advantageous to cooperation if external influences were favourable, and especially if members and stakeholders mobilized for this purpose (Bagar 1994, Saxena and Craig 1990). In this view, including cooperatives in primary networks would facilitate the social embedding of economic activity. This is what occurred in the case of social cooperatives that collaborated with non-profit organizations to create hybrid forms (Borzaga 1996). There is also hybridization with private organizations by way of holdings, allowing us to predict profound transformations in the cooperative formula – though leaders and managers refuse to acknowledge this possibility (Chomel and Vienney 1996). Finally, the articles examine the failures of cooperation in developing countries, especially Africa (Develtere 1993).

Third, associations, which are analysed more frequently on the basis of NPO criteria than on social economy criteria, account for about 20% of the articles for the period 1986–1996. As indicated earlier, the thematic issue on economic analysis with an NPO focus

represented the starting point (Ben-Ner and Gui 1991). Aside from a few theoretical analyses, the articles dealt with very concrete issues, such as the motives of donors and volunteers, whether or not government subsidies crowd out the donations (Steinberg 1991), the ability to take on volunteers and the cost of using them (Emanuele 1996), the competition between NPOs and for-profit organizations in commercial markets (Schiff and Weisbrod 1991), performance, employment volume and level (Bellet 1994), and issues related to regulation and to the management of activities (quasi market and government delegation). Lastly, the country profiles for Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom point to common trends regarding the significance of associations and their unequal levels of development (Anheier 1991, Borzaga 1991, Knapp and Kendal 1991).

Fourth, demutualization is a new theme, one that provided the focus for a CIRIEC symposium; the principal articles associated with this symposium were published in the *Annals* (Vol. 62 No. 3 1991). In the financial sector, deregulation and competition require major investments that partly justify this trend. In addition, the high annuities generated by mutual insurance companies make them attractive to private companies. Thus, cases of demutualization and resistance to demutualization are analysed, drawing primarily on the experience of the United Kingdom. The issue of the efficiency of mutual societies, too, was analysed (Donni and Hamende 1993, Buckland and Thion 1991). However, an evaluation of demutualization based on solid and more complete data was not carried out until the following period.

The 1997–2007 period: performance, governance and general interest

During the third period, articles on the social economy and the third sector numbered 142, an increase of 31% over the previous period. However, the research themes were more fragmented. Enterprise performance and efficiency, especially that of financial cooperatives and mutual societies stood out by far over other organizations (29.5%) and associations (16.2%). The changing boundaries between the third sector and the other sectors within the new mixed economy (15.4%) as well as governance and the institutional framework (14.7%) provided a focus for other articles. Other themes recurred less frequently. Among the latter, agricultural and rural cooperatives are significant, especially worker-managed enterprises and cooperatives in developing countries. New themes emerged, such as fair trade (Huybrechts 2007), social responsibility (Valor et al.

2007), evaluation (Jegers 2002) and social innovation (Harrisson and Vézina 2006).

First, the performance and efficiency of social economy enterprises accounted for the greatest number of articles. This theme potentially involves all sectors, though mainly financial cooperatives and mutual societies. In France, the profitability for cooperative banks during the 1992–1999 period was better than that for commercial banks (Sifakis-Kapetanakis 2007). In the UK, mutual societies presented users and consumers with savings that surpassed those of private companies by about 5% to 8% (Ashton and Letza 2003). Numerous performance-affecting factors were identified, including human resource management (Arcand et al. 2004) and integration into a relatively centralized network (Desrochers and Fischer 2005). Views on rationalization and groupings of savings and credit cooperatives encouraged research on economies of scale and scope (Leclerc, Fortin and Thivierge 1999, McKillop and Ferguson 1998).

In Anglo-Saxon nations, there was an unprecedented wave of privatization and demutualization. In the United States, Savings & Loans, which accounted for 70% of the assets held by the country's savings sector before 1980, held no more than 25% by the end of 1980, and 10% by the end of 1990 (Chaddad and Cook 2004). While this demutualization generally improved the capitalization of enterprises, in more than one case it met the aims of expropriation rather than those of efficiency, especially where legislation was not favourably disposed as in Australia (Davis 2007: 298).

The issue of performance and efficiency was also raised in the case of other sectors. In the field of agriculture, for example, the use of integrated management to resolve problems related to property rights or horizons improved the performance of Portuguese wine cooperatives (Rebelo, Calda and Teixeira 2002: 113). The performance of associations was also analysed by comparing it to that of other types of organizations. Due to their ownership structure, non-profit organizations working with colleges and schools proved to be more efficient than those in the public and private sectors (Barbetta and Turati 2003).

Second, articles on non-profit associations written from an NPO or social economy perspective sometimes had similar themes, such as evaluation (Jegers 2002, Mook and Quarter 2006) or social innovation (Zimmermann 1999, Bouchard 2006). Most of the articles dealing with non-profit associations based on NPO criteria can be

grouped together under two sub-themes, (i) donations and (ii) and volunteer work and the compensation of employees. For donations, the influence of tax incentives on the contributions of households to charitable institutions generated a few articles (Garcia and Marcuello 2001). Similarly, a few articles on volunteerism draw attention to intrinsic motivations, based on relational goods, community contacts and socializing and social capital (Prouteau and Wolff 2004). With regard to the employees of non-profit associations, a few articles dealt with their pay, which, for comparable work, is halfway between public sector and private sector wages (Almond and Kendall 2001). Others discussed non-pecuniary compensations (Mosca, Musella and Pastore 2007).

The funding of managers associations and new cooperatives is examined from the standpoint of the appropriateness of tools used in the areas of solidarity-based financing and micro-financing (Taupin and Glemain 2007, Ferraton and Vallat 2004). Here, financing is included in issues involving the hybridization of market, non-market and non-monetary resources (Nyssens 1997, Laville 2003). Similarly, articles dealing with social services that are based on the social economy are more sympathetic to social integration, enterprise creation and local development than those based on NPOs (Westerdahl and Westlund 1998, Spear and Bidet 2005).

Third, the theme of the shifting boundaries between the third sector and the other sectors tended to dominate during the 1997–2007 period (Ben-Ner 2002, Anheier and Ben-Ner 1997, Monnier and Thiry 1997). Several articles revealed that the social economy decreasingly represented a residual sector and increasingly a full sector. This explains the acceptance of the third sector from all quarters. At the same time, the boundaries between these evolving sectors have proved ever easier to cross, and this has given rise to the concept of the welfare mix (Bode et al. 2003). The new mixed economy differs from the old. In the latter, private enterprise and public enterprise often worked as a duo whose importance resided in engaging in mass production and consumption; this was complemented by a ‘welfarism’ in which vertical relationships for comparatively standard demands were dominant (Monzon 1997). In the new approach, the social economy, especially its evolving proximity services and non-market sphere, finds itself in a complementary relationship with the public sector. This relationship, which is a partnership, is also one of the themes discussed in the articles (Cafferata 1997, Chaves and Moreno 1997, Lévesque, Malo and Thiry 2001).

Fourth, the theme of governance – at the enterprise and State levels – emerges in the *Annals* as a feature of the plural economy and the new mixed economy (Bouchard 2005, Bernier, Bouchard and Lévesque 2003). Several articles demonstrate that social economy enterprises cannot ignore the issue of governance. This is due to the growing heterogeneity of their membership (and stakeholder recognition of the issue), the diversity of mobilized resources and action logics, and the increasingly strategic role played by managers in highly complex enterprises, frequently operating under extremely competitive conditions – even in the non-market sphere (Spear, Cornforth, Chaves and Schediwy 2004, Enjolras 2004). Finally, as governments increasingly require various types of enterprise to provide economic and social services of general interest, new structures considering the general interest will follow. The fact that these structures vary by country and even by sector allows us to assume that there are different governance regimes, some placing the emphasis on partnership, others on competition (Monnier and Thiry 1997, Lévesque 2003, Enjolras 2004 and 2008).

Conclusion

What have we learned from the articles in the *Annals* about general interest and transversal issues in the public sector and third sector? In the main, since 1997 many articles have advanced the hypothesis that there is a new paradigm on general interest. Previous analyses had demonstrated that general interest is a social and historical construction, and that methods for considering it had dwindled during the economic crisis of the mid-1970s, especially following liberalization policies. It is also a factor in change, and some articles have revealed the role played by the demands for increased participation and democratization that emerged in the world of work and then within civil society, giving rise to new solidarity perimeters. Thus, there were a growing number of spheres of solidarity delineating the general interest. They considered the local, continental and global levels, but did not neglect the national level. There resulted a multiplicity of definitions characterizing the general interest that needed to fit together, at least on certain issues. With regard to the economic and social services of general interest, the articles in the journal allow us to foresee major changes, mainly as concerns the enterprises and organizations providing these services, and the associated methods of regulation.

The *Annals* reveal, first, that the privatization of many public enterprises, the refocusing of their productive mission and their openness toward external capital meant that the way they differed from capitalist enterprises became less marked. At the same time, new mixed enterprises were initiated, as well as a growing number of public and private partnerships. Furthermore, acknowledging that there was a third sector – located on the periphery of the public and private sectors, according to some authors, or where they intersected, according to others – gave credibility to the plural economy concept. The third sector was shaped by two perspectives: that of the social economy and that of non-profit organizations (NPOs). Each perspective had its own set of criteria or parameters, and one dominated the other depending on whether the countries involved either (i) focussed on the parties assuming direct responsibility for activities of general interest or (ii) supported the stipulation that profits not be distributed. However, while enterprises and organizations belonging to the three sectors could now assume responsibility for activities supporting the general interest, several studies demonstrated that the boundaries between these sectors were increasingly likely to change, thereby challenging the very idea of sectors evolving separately. This anticipated the possibility of a new mixed economy, one that contrasted with its previous formulation and was based on a partnership between private enterprise and public enterprise. The novelty did not relate only to the number of entities, or to the way they were redefined, but also to the way they related to one another, which was determined by new forms of regulation.

Second, in focussing on their principal mission, governments re-engineered themselves, so to speak. Governments did not take it upon themselves to service the general interest, but instead made sure that the services were provided, and that adapted methods were employed in so doing. While this transformation initially occurred via State withdrawal from the production of services, and was accompanied by a process of deregulation, it opened up new types of regulation in nation-States and continental blocks (based on treaties) as well as in international bodies that were continuously being redefined. The two vehicles for re-defining regulation were (i) opening up to competition, the dominant trend, and (ii) the rise of partnerships and forms of cooperation compatible with this change. For general interest services, especially social services, the structuring continued to be carried out at the national level, which gave form to structures that were quite different from one another. However, since the general interest was not implemented,

the systems that referred to it tended toward 'a more or less democratic form of management', as seems to be true too of new forms of governance counting on cooperation and partnership (Lévesque and Thiry 2008).

From this standpoint, the concept of 'architecture of the methods for taking account of the general interest' puts to the fore the idea of a socio-economic combined system with microeconomic and macroeconomic components based on 'the coexistence of diverse organizations which, each in the own way, work towards the general interest, and with their respective solidarity perimeters juxtaposed' (Monnier and Thiry 1997: 326). Depending on the diversity of the structures, the relationships among the various components and organizations may give rise to substitutions as well as to cooperations and partnerships. As a result, it is possible to speak of a new general interest paradigm that simultaneously mobilizes the market, the State and civil society. In addition, since institutional design, too, can vary by activity sector, it is possible for a given sector to speak of governance regimes made up of actors, particularly the various forms of enterprises, the major social compromises and the implementation methods. The dominant characteristic of these regimes may be competitive, partnership-based or even hybrid.

Third, without going back over the themes involving public enterprises and the social economy explicitly, we may nevertheless conclude that the *Annals* have revealed the situation facing major public enterprises and the social economy. This situation has been profoundly changed by the privatization of many public enterprises, the decooperativization or demutualization of several major social economy enterprises, and a significant hybridization of basic forms. This trend has been stronger in some countries than in others, due to legislation and collective preference for privatization, as has been demonstrated in the case of Anglo-Saxon nations. The main reasons generally given are greater efficiency and improved access to capital. However, for social economy enterprises, this trend has been stronger when the members of these enterprises rely on managers for their strategic choices. Assessments of the transformation of enterprises should continue, though the number of articles on the topic is already enough for us to conclude that such manoeuvres are not always effective, and that some of the demutualization and decooperativization resulted in a sort of expropriation of members' assets. While the public sector lost some of its flagship divisions, most of the privatizations were not carried out to the benefit of major social economy enterprises.

On the other hand, the new components of the third sector experienced remarkable growth, especially in proximity services whose needs could generally not be met by the public sector, and in new social issues such as social and occupational integration, solidarity-based financing and fair trade. In some cases, these new third sector enterprises had to meet the challenge of competing with the private sector, though within the framework of non-tutelary relations with the State. On an even broader level, new themes, such as social responsibility, fair trade, and sustainable development could strengthen the idea of a social and solidarity-based economy that would take into consideration not only social and economic issues, but environmental ones as well; not only fairness for citizens within a nation, but also among nations themselves, between the North and the South, and with respect to future generations. These new concerns, which perforce are part of any development paradigm claiming to be geared to the future, could also build new bridges between entrenched and more recent components of the social economy. Furthermore, all enterprises and organizations subscribing to the aims of general interest could be solicited. These new concerns, which do not yet figure prominently in the *Annals*, will doubtlessly be further developed in the future.

Fourth, the journal is still open to most theoretical approaches and disciplines that take an interest in the economy, and especially economic activities oriented toward the general interest. We are witnessing the beginnings of a cross-fertilization of theoretical approaches. For example, the socio-economy has started to take into consideration certain outcomes or concepts that fall within the province of neo-classical theory: asymmetric information, market failures, government and civil society failures and governance theories that draw on these concepts. Here, economic sociology is not abandoning what gives it its coherence, but is instead adding a level of analysis that until now did not seem to have – at least from its own standpoint – major epistemological relevance. Similarly, some economists are returning to sociological concepts such as social capital, trust, networks, social bonds and cohesion and diverse action logics.

In economics, two trends have made an impact over the last few decades. The first consists in extending neo-classical theory's field of application to all human behaviour, as do human capital theory and other theories. Nevertheless, this broadening is often achieved at the cost of reducing the variety of action logics that motivate individual actors but do not always comply with formal rationality.

This brings us to a second trend, which seems to be favoured by economists interested in the pursuit of general interest, and whose analyses tend to internalize different logics. Seen from the standpoint of this trend, the niche occupied by the journal, especially its special focus on the general interest, could enable it to make a contribution not only to knowledge on public, mixed and social economy enterprises, but also to the theoretical tools that are indispensable to an understanding of economic and social relationships in a world more interdependent and complex than ever.

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