



## Working Group

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## Theme: SSE Utopias and Imaginary narratives

### Introduction

The Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) has a strong utopian dimension, a dimension weakened by the isomorphism phenomenon. In recent years, we see a return of utopias in society. What forms do the ideals of the SSE take today? Utopia is known to contribute to the instituting, creative function of the imaginary. The social imaginary can be notably approached through fictions, which possess a powerful symbolic force. Fictions (tales, literary stories, media stories, etc.) are conceived here as tools of transmission and transformation for the SSE. They are, to our knowledge, little used as such. This new working group would like to focus on the understanding of the SSE utopias, in particular through the study of imaginary stories, fictions, under diverse forms.

### A return of Utopia?

The utopian socialism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century broadly inspired the birth of SSE organizations. The work of Desroche (1976) has made a considerable contribution to this subject, by studying the different utopias at the origins of cooperative enterprises and by formalizing the trajectory from written utopias to practiced utopias. Cooperation is seen as a spin-off of utopia; it thus manifests the secularization of millenarianism, the idea that “the kingdom is for now”.

For a time banished for having led to the worst, then swallowed up by galloping liberalism, utopias seem to come back to our consciousnesses and imaginaries (Wolcott, 2022; Burawoy, 2021; Claeys, 2020). They take the form of a quest for a model other than liberalism, an alternative to breakdown according to collapsology, the search for a good life with the convivialism movement (Akuno & Nangwaya, Cooperation Jackson, 2017; Gilroy, 2010; Wright, 2010). Very recently, Covid has given rise to a certain utopian effervescence around sustainability and the ecological transition, and has put the question of the “world after” on the public and political scene (Allen, 2022; Claeys, 2022).

### The social imaginary

Utopia can be grasped with the help of the concept of social imaginary (Castoriadis, 1975), i.e., the shared imaginary representations. The social imaginary (Castoriadis, 1975; Ricoeur, 1984, 1997) comprises a duality. The imaginary representations have a double social function: at the same time to allow each one to order his practices within a social world legitimized by a base of beliefs, myths and shared ideologies, but also to allow each one to contribute to the creation of a new society through dreams, fantasies, utopias. On this subject, Castoriadis (1975) distinguishes an instituting, creative

function, and an instituted function, guiding the behaviours. Ricoeur (1984) identifies an ideological pole which aims at preserving the social order, while the second pole, utopian, aims at upsetting it.

To say it in other words, the social imaginary is a sensible understanding of the society by a collective. This collective sensible understanding then contrasts on the one hand with cognitive understandings (representations, political and scientific discourses) and on the other hand with imagination (imaginary specific to individual psyche).

SSE imaginaries therefore have a role to play in the transmission of values and practices specific to the SSE (instituted function) as well as in supporting its transformative role (instituting function), mobilize and propel alternative imaginaries. The imaginary appears in dreams, myths, art...

### **Fiction as expression of social imaginary**

We can find in the literature references to forms of SSE. As examples and to only remain in XIXth century in France, let's quote *Atala* by Chateaubriand where Social Economy is for the first time defined in its contemporary sense, *Travail* by Zola about which Henri Desroche has written, as Balzac's books analysed by Vienney (1977), novels published by Georges Sand in the years 1840 (*Le Compagnon du Tour de France*, *Consuelo*, *Le meunier d'Angibault* ...), or also the poems digged up by Jacques Rancière and Alain Faure in *La Parole ouvrière*.

One can also pay interest in the effects of the story. For example, tales are known to open to the magic and to the possibility of transforming the real. They are said having a power on people who listen to them and a learning of the freedom (Bricout, 2005). The impact of the imaginary can be explained by the symbolic effect, the belief allowing to regain freedom and creativity, and thus to fuel the cycle of giving (Caillé, 2019): "to make affects, sensations and representations - individual and collective - converge in a dynamic of life, freedom and creativity" (p. 256, our translation). This dynamic can thus support an activity of transformation, empowerment, and resilience.

A few years ago, management became interested in narratives and storytelling, the narrative and fictional process in organizations (Grimand, 2009; Gendron and Pierssens, 2009). Fiction plays a role of illustration, performativity of the real (anticipation, prefiguration), of a tool in case of difficulty in observation, or of renewal of the theory of collective action (Julliot, Lenglet and Rouquet, 2022). More recently, the social sciences, particularly management, have made room for creativity and artistic approaches. The instituting imaginaries can be grasped through the concept of futurity (Bodet & Lamarche, 2020).

On the actors' side, peace education ([www.grainesdepaix.org](http://www.grainesdepaix.org)) has long used tales as a means of raising awareness, and recently the NGO WWF (<https://agir.wwf.fr/stopextinction>) has also used them to raise awareness about the risk of extinction of certain species. Frédéric Lordon (2011) wrote in alexandrines about the financial crisis. In the same way, the European Union, the Network "get out the nuclear" or one NGO like Doctors Without Borders create cartoons to touch the audience sensitivity.

In this working group we wish to explore links between stories and imaginaries of the SSE, be it in recognized artistic pieces, in research works of thinkers of the SSE or in social actors' practices.

The question that emerges is thus: How can fiction stories contribute to transmitting and renewing the imaginaries of the SSE and how in return can SSE nourish the imaginaries?

### **The working group**

This is a new theme for CIRIEC. Nevertheless, it echoes the work on the resilience/regeneration of SSE enterprises. This project calls upon a diversity of disciplines and a diversity of scientific productions, specific of CIRIEC.

This work can have several components:

- 1) An academic production (book or journal).
- 2) A valorization addressing more the society (members of SSE enterprises for example), considering that the stories can constitute a strategic tool for SSE organizations to carry out their mission of cooperative education. For example, in the form of an e-book or digital files.
- 3) A research-action with actors wishing to write SSE stories

Method: Work in seminars with sharing of readings, presentation of analyses, cross-readings. The objective is to combine scientific rigor with room for creativity, in order to get out our academic routines.

Work language: French and English

### **Possible contributions**

This working group will reflect on the relations between stories and imaginaries/utopia of SSE, investigating, for example, the following questions (non-limiting):

- From a socio-historical perspective, which tales, and how, have sustained the social imaginary of the SSE? What can be said about their production conditions, targeted audience, effects?
- How do important SSE concepts, such as cooperation or solidarity, appear in stories of different cultures and traditions?
- Which are the stories that inspire the SSE today? How can they contribute to put the SSE on the move towards transition? Can they contribute to its visibility? What are the imaginaries operating today towards a more fair and ecological world (sustainable development, decoloniality, degrowth, transition, post-growth...)? How does SSE integrate utopias carried by new social movements (eco-feminism, afro-futurism...)?
- How do they help SSE enterprises legitimize and mobilize their stakeholders around their sustainable development project and objectives? How is the dialectic instituting/instituted articulated through diverse institutional logics? How are they reflected in the vision, mission or the economic model and impact of SSE enterprises?
- Are the stories similar in all components of SSE or are they distinct? What are the challenges and limits of the frameworks of action provided by SSE in practiced utopias?

The study is open to all literary forms, such as stories, poetry, drama, novels, legends, fables, cartoons, movies, etc., but also to any artistic practice.

In the same line, historical and geographical spectrums are broad.

### **Calendar**

Year 1:

- Discussion and adoption by CIRIEC International during the Congress of Valencia
- Dissemination of a call for expressions of interest
- Receipt of abstracts

- Back to authors about proposals' acceptance
- Constitution of the group, inter-knowledge
- Exploration of the subject in a seminar (state of art, problematization,)
- Exchanges during the Seoul CIRIEC International Conference

Year 2:

- Receipt of final contribution drafts (approximately 1 year after submission of the abstract)
- Exchanges during seminars and discussion of received contributions drafts
- Commitment to the process of publishing scientific work

Year 3:

- Academic Component: Publication + organization of debates in research circles
- Society component: Start of the popularization targeting players and teachers (to be determined)

### **Among considered publications**

*Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics or another journal*

*Book*

*CIRIEC Working Papers*

*Other dissemination supports (webinars, videos,...)*

### **Submitting a proposal**

**The deadline is December 10, 2022.** Abstracts should be of not more than 500 words (excluding references) and should include: A statement of the empirical or theoretical concern; a short summary locating the concern within a wider literature; a concise account of the empirical or theoretical methodological approach; the main arguments of the paper and an indication of the supporting evidence; a statement of the main conclusions and their relevance to an international audience.

We also welcome more emerging topics. We wish to know what you intend to work on, with whom, according to which methodology and based on which literature.

Abstract are to be sent to Christine Dussart, CIRIEC, [christine.dussart@uliege.be](mailto:christine.dussart@uliege.be)

Email object should be "Contribution to 'SSE Utopias and imaginary narratives' Working Group" and the message must include names and affiliations of all authors and email address of the corresponding author.

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