



CHAPTER 5

GREEN UTOPIAS, LOCAL UTOPIAS: THE ROLE OF THE IMAGINARIES OF THE SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY IN NARRATIVES OF TRANSITION

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Chapter 5

Green Utopias, Local Utopias: The Role of the Imaginaries of the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) in Narratives of Transition

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Abstract

Although utopias ran out of steam during a twentieth century more marked by ideologies, they made a comeback from the 1970s onwards, both through the philosophy of deep ecology and the utopian fictions that renewed the literary genre. Green utopias thus appear that maintain a specific relationship to time and space, whose action provides the arrangements. There is thus a close link between utopias and their experiments, at the heart of which is the social and solidarity economy (SSE). What, then, is the role of the imaginaries of the SSE in the narratives of the transition? This article proposes to answer this question by crossing three books that have a common core around the principle "*small is beautiful*": Ernest F. Schumacher's 1973 essay of the same name, Ernest Callenbach's 1975 novel *Ecotopia*, and Rob Hopkins' essay *What If... We were unleashing our imagination to create the future we want?* in 2019. This will lead us to specify their utopian coordinates, to analyze the role of the imaginaries of the SSE in the re-embedding of the economy and technology in society, as well as their inclusion in dissemination strategies based on experiments whose models must be disseminated.

Keywords: Green utopias, small is beautiful, social and solidarity economy, experimentation, transformation strategy

JEL-Codes: B55

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Introduction

Green utopias have become increasingly numerous over the past fifty years, in connection with the emergence of the ecological question, of which the Meadows report on the limits to growth published in 1972 provides a point of reference. Although utopias ran out of steam during a twentieth century more marked by ideologies¹, they made a comeback from the 1970s onwards, both through the philosophy of deep ecology² and the utopian fictions that renewed the literary genre. The literary genre was thus renewed by the ecotopias, which are, however, in this context, crossed by ambiguities, caught between utopias and dystopias³, as in the novel *The Dispossessed* published by Ursula Le Guin in 1974.

Invented by Thomas More in 1516, utopia comes from the Greek *utopia* and means “without place”. Another meaning is given to it in the sixteenth placed at the top of the eponymous book, where the humanist brings it closer to “the good place”, *eutopia*. Born of a fictional story, whose original Latin title *nusquam* means “nowhere”, utopia is always consigned to the realm of the imaginary. It is perceived as an ideal which, although rational, distances it from all reality. While the Larousse defines it as “an imaginary and rigorous construction of a society, which constitutes, in relation to the one who realizes it, an ideal or a counter-ideal”, it also presents it as “a project whose realization is impossible, [an] imaginary conception”. A shift thus occurs from the imaginary to the unrealizable, which produces two tensions.

The first is underlined by Henri Desroche: “*No utopian caravan has ever reached its mirage. But without this mirage, no caravan would ever have set off*”⁴. Utopias carry a horizon of expectation that has implications for the present. They may still be incomplete, but they are, nonetheless, generating actions. A second tension is that “*utopia, which is nowhere is, nevertheless, first and foremost a space*”, according to Françoise Choay⁵. It is thus possible to speak of local utopias. They are often ideal cities, in which political communities are located.

Utopias therefore maintain a specific close relationship to time and space, the action of which provides the arrangements. There is a close link between utopias and their experiments, so that “the proof of utopia is a utopian test”⁶. It is at this point of articulation between written utopias and practiced utopias that the social and solidarity economy (SSE) finds itself. And green utopias are no exception. Although

¹ Paul Ricoeur, *L'idéologie et l'utopie*, Paris, Seuil, 1997.

² Arne Naess, “The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement. A summary”, *Inquiry. An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 16, Issue 1-4, 1973, p. 95-100.

³ Jean-Paul Déléage, « Utopies et dystopies écologiques », *Écologie et politique*, n° 37, 2008/3, p. 33-43.

⁴ Henri Desroche, *Le projet coopératif, son utopie et sa pratique, ses appareils et ses réseaux, ses espérances et ses déconvenues*, Paris, Économie et humanisme/Éditions ouvrières, 1976.

⁵ Françoise Choay, *La règle et le modèle. Sur la théorie de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme*, Paris, Seuil, 1980.

⁶ Thierry Paquot, « Les lieux des utopies. Petit catalogue commenté », *Diogène*, No. 273-274, 2021, pp. 86-104.

it is rarely made explicit, the SSE occupies a special place in the conception of a sustainable society⁷.

This immediately raises a question: what is the role of the imaginaries of the SSE in the narratives of the transition? It is well known that social utopias were one of the main sources of the SSE in the nineteenth century⁸. For some of them, the ecological question was very present, which can be observed in Fourierism⁹ and in the *News from Nowhere* by William Morris¹⁰. Ecotopias reconnect with this filiation by updating it to anticipate post-industrial societies.

To answer this question, we will cross three works with a common core around the principle “*small is beautiful*”. Here we find the essay published by Ernest F. Schumacher in 1973¹¹, which is cited by the specialist of green utopias, Lisa Garforth, as one of the most influential works of the period¹². Then came *Ecotopia*, published two years later by Ernest Callenbach, who draws inspiration very directly from it to develop the model green utopia¹³. We will compare these two works with Rob Hopkins' essay on the imagination, published more than forty years apart¹⁴, which he begins with a utopian story. This addition is not fortuitous, the movement of cities in transition, of which he is the founder, was born in Totnes, where Schumacher College is located, created in 1991 to train in ecology. Rob Hopkins, who taught permaculture there, was also the winner of the Schumacher Prize in 2008, awarded by the Schumacher Society for his Transition Manual published by the publisher Green Books, which is also based in Totnes¹⁵.

Through these three books we will seek to grasp the role of the imaginaries of the SSE in the narratives of the transition, first by specifying their utopian coordinates, i.e., their dual relationship to time and space. We will then see that these imaginaries of the SSE promote a re-embedding of the economy and technology in society. Finally, these imaginaries are part of transformation strategies, which are based on experiments designed as models to be spread.

⁷ See for example: François Deblangy, “Beyond Green-Washing: Sustainable Development and Environmental Accountability through Co-operators’ Eyes (A French Perspective)”, in Julian Manley, Anthony Webster and Olga Kuznetsova (eds.), *Co-operation and Co-operatives in 21st-Century Europe*, Bristol, Bristol University Press, pp. 39-59.

⁸ André Gueslin, *L’invention de l’économie sociale. Le XIXe siècle français*, Paris, Economica, 1987.

⁹ René Scherer, *L’écologie de Charles Fourier*, Paris, Anthropos, 2001.

¹⁰ William Morris, *News from nowhere or an epoch of rest being some chapters from a utopian Romance*, London/Edinburgh/Paris, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1890.

¹¹ Ernst Friedrich Schumacher, *Small is beautiful. A study of economics as if people mattered*, London, Blond and Briggs, 1973.

¹² Lisa Garforth, *Green utopias. Environmental hope before and after nature*, Cambridge, Polity, 2018.

¹³ Ernest Callenbach, *Ecotopia. The notebooks and report of William Weston*, Berkeley, Banyan Tree Books, 1975.

¹⁴ Rob Hopkins, *From what is to what if. Unleashing the power of imagination to create the future we want*, White River Junction, Chelsea Green Publishing, 2019.

¹⁵ Rob Hopkins, *The transition handbook. From oil dependency to local resilience*, Totnes, Green books, 2008.

The utopian coordinates

The localization of utopias requires us to grasp their coordinates according to two axes: the relationship to time and the relationship to space. The process of autonomization that underlies them can bring them closer to the meso-regulatory theory, according to which “the meso-shaped spaces that emerge [...] are autonomous from the macroeconomic level in the sense that they are not necessarily in line with the driving or dominant sectors, nor identical, nor marked by isomorphy. They are structured by institutional arrangements that are “meso-economic” by socio-historical construction. They are defined by a structure of rules”¹⁶.

Futurity

Among the channels of differentiation at work in the processes of constitution of meso spaces, we find futurity, in other words, the representations of the future carried by people and organizations, which particularly identifies the SSE and also the narratives of the transition. It is a particular thread that the transition weaves between the past, the present and the future. In the words of Reinhart Koselleck¹⁷, we could say that it combines a field of experience, going back to the fossil age, and a horizon of post-carbon expectation. Far from any determinism, the transition acts on the present to bring about the expected future.

During his lectures, Rob Hopkins invites participants to close their eyes and imagine the future, not as it should be, but as it would be if everything that could be done for the transition had been done. It is therefore not a question of fantasizing about an ideal city that would be out of reach, nor of relaying a catastrophism that leads to inaction, but of imagining a possible and desirable future to encourage people to take action. Rob Hopkins seeks to “create nostalgia for an exciting future”¹⁸.

The first pages of his essay open with just such a narrative, in the first person, in which we find the description of a green and local utopia: ecological housing, shared gardens, public transport and cycle paths, decline of the car, alternative pedagogies, solidarity bakery, third places, local production, reduction of working hours, universal income, community projects, Reappropriation of the streets, participatory democracy, enrichment of biodiversity, revitalization of social ties, etc. He calls for “stories of what life could look like if we were able to find a way over the course of the next twenty years to be bold, brilliant and decisive, to act in proportion to the challenges we are facing and to aim for a future we actually feel good about”¹⁹.

¹⁶ Thomas Lamarche et al., « Saisir les processus méso : une approche régulationniste », *Économie appliquée*, n°1, 2021, pp. 13-49.

¹⁷ Reinhart Koselleck, *Le futur passé. Contribution à la sémantique des temps historiques*, Paris, Éditions de l'EHESS, 1990.

¹⁸ Conference with Rob Hopkins, « Accélérons la transition ! », Hôtel de Ville de Bordeaux, 5 April 2023.

¹⁹ Rob Hopkins, *op. cit.*, 2019.

This approach is also found in Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia*. The scene takes place twenty years after the secession of three states on the West Coast of the United States, California, Oregon and Washington State. The narrator is a journalist from the Time Post who goes there to break isolationism, "understand this nation" and verify the results of the "social experiments" that are being carried out there. Initially considering ecotopian ideas as a "threat", William Weston - that is the narrator's name - ends up converting to them and remains living in Ecotopia. This narrative process aims at realism, both through the reportage that focuses on the facts and through the description of concrete actions. Like Rob Hopkins, Ernest Callenbach refuses to situate himself in utopia, he evokes a "semi-utopia"²⁰ to characterize not a perfect world, but a world that is "on the right track". In transition, we might say.

This experience of time can be compared to the "gap between past and future" evoked by Hannah Arendt. She describes it as "the odd in-between period which sometimes inserts itself into historical time when not only the later historians but the actors and witnesses, the living themselves, become aware of an interval in time which is altogether determined by things that are no longer and things that are not yet". She concludes that such moments "may contain the moment of truth".

To understand the phenomenon, Hannah Arendt takes up the parable in which Franz Kafka depicts a man caught between two antagonistic forces: the past that drives him on and the future that blocks his path. But, unlike him, she does not represent time as linear. The timeline is broken at this point of intersection. The double flow, which would have collided without man, offers him a battlefield on which to stand in order to deploy his activity of thought, as infinite as the two forces at the origin of it. This break makes it possible to fight against "the future which drives us back into the past"²¹.

Territorial anchoring

This futurity is anchored in the territories, and not only through narrative construction. Of course, utopias are most often localized, but for green utopias the "local" is central. Schumacher's influence is felt here. Focusing on questions of scale and denouncing "the idolatry of gigantism", he concludes that "people can be themselves only in small comprehensible groups. Therefore we must learn to think in terms of an articulated structure that can cope with a multiplicity of small-scale units"²². Green utopias are therefore first and foremost local utopias in which, in Foucauldian language, heterotopias, that is to say, "real places, effective places, places that are drawn in the very institution of society, and which are a kind of counter-location, kinds of utopias actually realized, in which all the other real locations that can be found within

²⁰ Brice Matthieussent, « Préface : Changer », in Ernest Callenbach, *Ecotopia*, Paris, Folio, 2018.

²¹ Hannah Arendt, *La crise de la culture. Huit exercices de pensée politique*, Paris, folio, 2018.

²² Ernst Friedrich Schumacher, *op. cit.*

the culture are at once represented, contested and inverted, kinds of places that are outside of all places, although nevertheless actually localizable.²³

The local dimension is consubstantial with the transition promoted by Rob Hopkins. The movement began in Totnes, a town of 9,000 inhabitants in the southwest of England in which it relies on a very dense ecological network (Steiner school, vegetarian or organic restaurants, Ernst F. Schumacher center, ecological funeral home, etc.), although taking place in a town run by conservatives. In line with the priority objective of a post-oil transition, the transition implies a relocation of agriculture, and also of the economy (local currencies), energy, democracy, education, tourism, health, etc²⁴. The *Transition Handbook*, which presents the methodology, deploys the movement at the scale of cities. In *From what is to what if*, Rob Hopkins begins his imaginary story on the scale of a neighborhood and ends it by calling his readers to action: "Go out and find it [your dream], pay it a visit, make it happen where you live!"²⁵.

This decentralized structure is found in *Ecotopia*. The narrator points out that "the ecotopians largely dismantled their national tax and spending system, and local communities regained control over all basic life systems". They "place their faith for improvement of living conditions in the further reorganization of their cities into constellations of minicities, and in a continued dispersion into the countryside"²⁶. This local distribution of power is accompanied by a network of services (health, schools) as well as the economy, and therefore by a demographic decline in large cities in favour of a rebalancing of regional development.

Green utopias are first conceived at a meso level, which itself takes shape in a revitalized local space. As the school of proximity points out, territorial anchoring "arises when territorial organization (geographical proximity) proves capable of generating organizational and institutional proximity effects based on interaction and cooperation between units in the same geographical proximity"²⁷. By generating dynamic ecosystems, relocation schemes make it possible to anchor the futurity linked to the transition in the territories.

Cooperation, understood as the construction of a common work, is at the heart of the work of valorization and specification of local resources. Local potential is mobilized by the creativity of local populations to regenerate local solidarity and resist the effects of crises through the development, for example, of organizational or

²³ Michel Foucault, « Des espaces autres », *Empan*, 2004/2, n° 54, pp. 12-19.

²⁴ Luc Semal et Mathilde Szuba, « Villes en transition : imaginer les relocalisations en urgence », *Mouvements*, 2010/3, n° 63, pp. 130-136.

²⁵ Rob Hopkins, *op. cit.*, 2019.

²⁶ Ernest Callenbach, *op. cit.*

²⁷ Jean-Benoît Zimmermann, « Le territoire dans l'analyse économique : proximité géographique et institutionnelle », *Revue française de gestion*, Vol. 4, No. 184, 2008, pp. 105-118.

social innovations²⁸. It plays a key role in territorial intermediation by initiating "a set of processes, formal and informal, institutionalised or not, regulating the relations between actors - mainly local - and their behaviour, in order to promote the territorial development project and the construction of project territories"²⁹. It is the lever for a re-embedding of the economy in the territory, making up for the crisis of market coordination or public policies.

The re-embedding of the economy

In the green utopias the SSE is the main vector of the re-embedding of the economy and technology in society. According to the Polanyian theory³⁰, there is a double movement: on the one hand, economic liberalism aims to establish a self-regulating market and, on the other hand, social protection involves state-sponsored regulations, such as legislation, and also forms of collective action. Among these latter, the counter-movement may be defensive to preserve existing rights, but also offensive, as in the case of green utopias, to seek new ways of decommodification³¹.

From cooperation to cooperatives

Green utopias are based on the imaginaries of the social and solidarity economy. Ecotopian children are educated to cooperate. They have workshops in which there is no boss, decisions are taken collectively and the profits are allocated partly equally between them and partly to the purchase of school materials. Neither private nor public, the schools themselves are the property of the teachers.

A vast movement to recover companies took place in Ecotopia following the secession that caused the exile of the owners. Most farms, factories and shops thus became the property of the workers. French examples dating from the late 1960s are mentioned, which can be assumed to refer in particular to Lip, whose factory was occupied in 1973 to contest its closure, under the slogan: "It's possible: we manufacture, we sell, we pay ourselves".

It is thus "workers' control" that prevails. Although the notion of a cooperative is rarely used, especially for consumer cooperatives, all the foundations of it can be found: "a man cannot just set up a business, offer wages to employees, fire them when he no longer needs them, and pocket whatever profits he can make"³². Companies are governed by the principles of "partnership" (collective ownership; one person, one vote) and profit-sharing. This reconfiguration of the relationship to capital led to

²⁸ André Torre, « Théorie du développement territorial », *Géographie, économie, société*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 2015, pp. 273-288.

²⁹ Fabien Nadou et Bernard Pecqueur, « Pour une socioéconomie de l'intermédiation territoriale : une approche conceptuelle », *Géographie, économie, société*, Vol. 22, 2020/3, pp. 245-263.

³⁰ Karl Polanyi, *The great transformation*, New York/Toronto, Rinehart, 1944.

³¹ Geoff Goodwin, "Rethinking the Double Movement: Expanding the Frontiers of Polanyian Analysis in the Global South", *Development and Change*, Vol. 49, Issue 5, pp. 1268-1290.

³² Ernest Callenbach, *op. cit.*

the prohibition of external investment, with only loans from the national banking system being permitted. These companies are also limited to a maximum size of three hundred employees, according to the principle "*small is beautiful*".

The inspiration comes very directly from Ernst Friedrich Schumacher's book, in which the Scott Bader Commonwealth is highlighted. Founded in 1920, Scott Bader & Co. Ltd. specializes in the production of polyester resins. By his owner's admission, "[he] was up against the capitalist philosophy of dividing people into the managed on the one hand, and those that manage on the other"³³. Considering the practice of profit-sharing to be insufficient, he created the Commonwealth in 1951, or common property, to which he transferred 90% of the property (the remaining 10% having been transferred in 1963).

He then associated it with a constitution aimed at imposing certain limits on the company. Limited to 350 employees, the company expects a wage gap of one to seven. It is made up of "partners", not employees, and its board of directors is appointed by the Commonwealth and accountable to it. While 60% of the profits are allocated to taxes and to self-financing, the remaining 40% is allocated to the Commonwealth, half of which is used for the payment of bonuses to workers and the other half is given to charity.

For the post-growth Timothée Parrique, "the SSE [...] it is the economy of the future that really exists"³⁴. He is particularly interested in cooperatives and articulates them as a mission-driven company created by the 2019 Pacte Law and inspired by the American B Corps, which provides for the possibility for companies to adopt a mission, i.e., to include in their articles of association one or more social or environmental objectives that they pursue in the context of their activities. Timothée Parrique proposes not only to transform this possibility into a legal obligation, but also to "democratize the economy", thus to "transform all private companies into cooperatives", to ensure that the economy is placed at the service of the needs of territories and populations³⁵.

Such a conversion of companies could be inspired by the existing employee stock ownership plans (ESOP) in the United States³⁶. This system, which benefits from tax incentives, allows companies to create a trust responsible for acquiring the company's ownership titles, based on a mechanism combining the deduction of a share of profits and debt. The trust is most often managed by an Esop committee, on which representatives of the managers and employees sit. A European adaptation is currently

³³ Ernst Friedrich Schumacher, *op. cit.*

³⁴ Timothée Parrique, entretien réalisé par Camille Dorival and Timothée Duverger, "The SSE is the economy of the future that really exists", *Carenews*, 18 January 2024. Available from the address: <https://www.carenews.com/carenews-info/news/l-ess-c-est-l-economie-du-futur-reellement-existante-entretien-avec-l-economiste>

³⁵ Timothée Parrique, *Ralentir ou périr. L'économie de la décroissance*, Paris, Seuil, 2022.

³⁶ Nicolas Aubert, « L'actionnariat salarié aux États-Unis. Guide de l'épargne et de l'épargnant: Ce que l'épargnant doit savoir, 2020. <https://hal.science/hal-02514614v2>

being tested in the form of a cooperative in Slovenia³⁷ and under study within the General Confederation of Scops and Scics in France³⁸.

The models

Co-operatives are also very present in Rob Hopkins' *From what is to what if*. They even form cooperative ecosystems, models that can be duplicated. He first mentions the Liège Food-Land Belt (CATL) launched in 2013 by the Liège en Transition collective to relocate the food system. Rob Hopkins puts the stakes of this initiative in these words: "What if, within one generation, the majority of the food grown in this city were to come from the land immediately surrounding it?"³⁹ The CATL was born from the meeting between food-buying groups and cooperatives favouring short circuits.

In Liège, it is more particularly the joint purchasing groups (GAC) that are developing to build short circuits between the city centre and the producers located on the outskirts. Poorly institutionalized, their sustainability is fragile, based on the commitment of their members. There is no contract between producers and consumers and there is no coordination body. They are therefore renewed quickly. Consumer cooperatives are also spreading to develop short circuits through stores, which can also host platforms for buying and selling products or even supply the GACs and sometimes take the form of cooperative supermarkets in which the cooperators commit themselves to carry out certain tasks on a voluntary basis. Cooperatives are more stable, involve regional stakeholders more broadly in their governance and seek to build alternative agri-food systems⁴⁰.

In this context, the CATL was created as a non-profit association to "promote the development of food and short and local supply chains, by raising awareness of these themes, supporting the actors who make them up and facilitating their development". In concrete terms, this leads it to carry out territorial diagnosis and foresight work, as well as awareness-raising actions for stakeholders, including the Nourrir Liège Festival, or to offer support for collective catering as well as local policies.

The synergies between the city and its food-supplying countryside aim to feed the population, create jobs and preserve agricultural land. It brings together a hundred market gardeners and promotes the structuring of a cooperative sector. There are now about thirty cooperatives, including distribution activities (stores,

³⁷ Tej Gonza, "A new vision of a social enterprise: Standards and scaling social employee ownership in EU", Chaire TerrESS, 7 décembre 2022. Available from the address: <https://chaireterres.hypotheses.org/2827>

³⁸ Timothée Duverger et Christophe Sente, « Vers une République du travail : proposition pour une Europe sociale », *Note*, Fondation Jean-Jaurès, 17 mai 2024. Available from the address: https://www.jean-jaures.org/publication/vers-une-republique-du-travail-proposition-pour-une-europe-sociale/?post_id=56497&export_pdf=1

³⁹ Rob Hopkins, *op. cit.*, 2019.

⁴⁰ Antonia Bousbaine, « Des initiatives pour manger local : le cas wallon », *Pour*, n° 239, 2021/1, p. 69-84.

sales platforms, etc.), production activities (market gardeners, farms, breweries, wine, etc.) and services (delivery platforms, access to land, etc.). The model initiated by Liège has since spread to Charleroi, Verviers, Tournai and Namur.

On how local communities are taking over the economy, Hopkins also cites the “Preston model”. In the early 2010s, this city, hit by deindustrialization and austerity following the subprime crisis, decided to no longer depend on external investment for its development, following their failure as part of the urban renewal project called “Tithebarn”⁴¹. It has therefore implemented a “community wealth building” (CWB) strategy. Following an analysis of the public expenditure of its main so-called ‘anchor’ institutions, which include local government, the university, the police and the main social landlord, the city of Preston discovered that only 5% of expenditure remained in Preston and 39% in the Lancashire region. They amounted to 19% and 81% respectively after 5 years of implementation.

This raised the following question rephrased by Rob Hopkins: “*what if we had a much more democratic economy and we had forms of economic activity, production and ownership that were a lot more rooted in the lands of the public and the community*”⁴²? For this they found inspiration in the Mondragón cooperative complex and the Evergreen cooperatives of Cleveland, a network of cooperatives that have made it possible to respond to public contracts whilst also providing jobs for people who are very far away with decent wages and a share in profits and governance.

Based on a new approach to public procurement designed in partnership with a think tank, the Centre for Local Economic Strategies, and the University of Central Lancashire, which recommended the development of a cooperative ecosystem, the city of Preston has been successful in mobilizing local suppliers. Public spending in Preston has risen from £38 million in 2013 to £111 million in 2017 and from £111 million to £486 million in Lancashire over the same period. This has supported the development of cooperatives in the catering, technology and digital sectors, among other things. Unemployment fell from 6.5% in 2014 to 3.1% in 2017.

This CWB strategy is based on 5 axes: the alliance of local public institutions to redirect public spending locally, the stimulation of the capacity for initiative and the emergence of a plural and democratic local economy (local or social enterprises, cooperatives, etc.), local redirection of investment from local banks and pension funds, decent employment and wage conditions for workers, use of land and property for the benefit of local residents and groups. Recent developments integrate the green economy and the fight against climate change⁴³.

⁴¹ Julian Manley and Philippe B. Whyman (Edited by), *The Preston Model and Community Wealth Building. Creating a Socio-Economic Democracy for the Future*, London, Routledge, 2021.

⁴² Rob Hopkins, *op. cit.*, 2019.

⁴³ “Preston Supports Climate Change and Community Wealth Building Through New Funding”, 25 mai 2023. Available from the address: <https://www.preston.gov.uk/article/7177/Preston-Supports-Climate-Change-and-Community-Wealth-Building-Through-New-Funding>

Conclusion

The SSE has a major role to play in the imaginaries of transition, in which it occupies mediating functions. It provides green utopias with their coordinates, by crossing both a particular futurity, the “nostalgia for an exciting future”, in the words of Rob Hopkins, and a strong territorial anchoring directly inspired by the principle “*small is beautiful*”. The SSE thus appears as a local utopia in action, bearer of another future that narratives have the function of staging.

In this context, cooperation processes may be analyzed as a mode of coordination that differs from the market economy and the administered economy. Although they do concern all areas, they are particularly evident in the economy through cooperatives and more broadly cooperative ecosystems. In green utopias, companies are thus the property of workers, not of capital, whether from creation or takeover. Models are cited, such as the CATL of Liège or the City of Preston, which are spreading to other territories.

However, as significant as the place of the SSE may be, it is often not identified as such, nor as a movement structured around a common reference. The initiatives relating to it cover only a part of it, cooperatives, and more particularly the Scops, and are part of the transition framework in which they are reduced to a strictly functional role. This leads to their becoming invisible while participatory democracy prevails.

The SSE can thus be considered as a post-growth economy. On the one hand, it offers a counter-model to the conventional company. Its non-profit purpose orients it as an economy of needs rather than an economy of profits. On the other hand, it is a counter-model of development to extractivist growth by revealing and mobilizing local resources in an endogenous logic⁴⁴.

It emerges that the SSE needs to reappropriate green utopias in order to establish its own imaginaries. While intercooperation, in other words cooperation between SSE organizations, is too often an incantation, it could thus be placed in the service of a cause greater than itself.

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⁴⁴ Timothée Duverger, « L'économie sociale et solidaire, un mode d'entreprendre pour la post-croissance ? », *Mondes en décroissance*, n°3, 2024. Available from the address: <https://polen.uca.fr/revue-opcd/index.php?id=455>

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