

# Conclusion. Public - Social and Solidarity Economy Partnerships (PSSEPs) and collective action paradigm

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CIRIEC STUDIES SERIES 1



CONCLUSION

**PUBLIC - SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY  
ECONOMY PARTNERSHIPS (PSSEPS)  
AND COLLECTIVE ACTION PARADIGM**

Philippe Bance

*Part of **Providing public goods and commons. Towards coproduction and new forms of governance for a revival of public action** by Philippe BANCE (dir.), 2018*

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## Conclusion

### **Public - Social and Solidarity Economy Partnerships (PSSEPs) and collective action paradigm**

Philippe BANCE\*

In the double perspective of the analytical renewals created, one, by the recommendations of the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), stressing the social utility, of the production of global public goods and, two, by the works of the Ostrom School, demonstrating the benefits of governance by the commons, this work places in sharp relief the leading role played by the public and social-economy organisations. These organisations have indeed an essential role in the production of public goods and commons following a logic of theoretical advocacy but also – a phenomenon seldom analysed in the literature and largely underestimated – basing on the dynamics of partnership between these organisations developing co-production or joint production of commons and public goods. These coproduction and joint production, the convergences of action and the multiplicity of forms of partnership between the public sector and the SSE organisations - which may be called public-social and solidarity economy partnerships (PSSEPs) - are brought to the fore in the various chapters of the work. The illustrations given explain the different facets and operational reach worldwide.

However, this book is not a simple list of the partnerships dynamics between the public sector and the SSE organisations, nor is it an analysis of the opportunities offered by the coproduction or joint production of commons and public goods. It presents the reasons explaining their existence due to the fact of a new collective action paradigm. It underlines the scope of transformations and innovations that may emerge from the cooperation of public and SSE sectors, in terms - among other things - of local and regional initiatives; it also analyses the questions that may be raised around behaviours peculiar to the individual players. It also focuses on the benefits offered by the PSSEP for the co-construction of public or collective action. These analyses culminate in questioning the role of these partnerships in the context of what might be called a process of creative destruction of collective action.

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## 1. A partnership dynamics that fits in a new paradigm of public action

After the Washington Consensus of the 1980s, the ways of initiating public action were upset throughout the world. The New Public Management (NPM) led the public authorities to let do by others, rather than to intervene directly in economic activity, in order to produce notably public goods. It was a matter of placing collective action within a logic of results, for the attainment of quantified objectives, stimulation of innovation, flexibility, reduction of public spending, by introducing management tools and methods largely inspired by the private sector (Grefe, 1999). This NPM, carried by the increasing hegemony in economic theory of neo-liberal currents (theories of incentive, contracts, public choice, property rights ...) also reduced the leeway for the States in an international environment marked by a growing interdependence between nations and the downward pressure of the public debt. This led to massive privatisations since the 1990s (privatizationbarometer, 2015-16) and recourse to the public-private partnership (PPP) to produce public goods. These PPPs were deployed worldwide, despite the theoretical misgivings that they aroused given the fact of asymmetry of information, transaction costs and the incomplete character of the contracts burdened with the vaunted theoretical values (Marty, Trosa and Voisin, 2006). The PPPs were also rolled out, despite their high costs over the long term for public finances, as shown by some recent reports that draw up the balance-sheet of the inefficiency and high degree of complexity of the contractual systems characterising those PPPs (National Audit Office, 2010, 2011; Cour des Comptes, 2017)<sup>1</sup>.

The question of successful internalising public missions at low cost for the local or regional authorities, allowing the creation of infrastructures but, more generally, allowing management of public goods over time, has been raised with exceptional keenness (Bance, 2015)<sup>2</sup>. The PSSEPs are an opportunity, since the coming of the NPM in the 1980s, in particular in the United Kingdom: meeting the needs of economic and social action by relying on the SSE organisations to make arrangement for the assuming of missions that would formerly have been assigned directly to public authorities or public organisations, and would be insufficiently accounted for by them, given, for example, the urge to reduce the costs of collective action. The partnership dynamics thus activated blurs the boundary between public sector, private sector and SSE: activities that once used to fall within the public sphere are now transferred to other sectors. In the context of the concept that inspired the NPM, particularly from its beginnings in the United Kingdom, the move was in fact made squarely in a logic of substitution, of replacement of action by public

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<sup>1</sup> These reports concern in particular the very high long-term costs of PPPs deployed in the United Kingdom and in France. The report from the French State Audit Office (Cour des Comptes) on the Justice sector calls for the discontinuation of the practice of PPPs.

<sup>2</sup> The question of internalising general-interest missions raised in this work with respect to public organisations is thus also raised in a more general way for the organisations of the SSE.

institutions or organisations by that of private enterprises or by the SSE, rather than seeking any complementarity with not-for-profit players.

This work does, however, show that the new paradigm of public action has opened real opportunities for complementarity between organisations in response to the expectations of populations within the territories.

## **2. Various institutional systems allowing the production of public goods and innovation to meet expectations within the territories**

As stated by Xabier Itçaina in the conclusion to the work brought out in association with CIRIEC's Scientific Commission "Social and Cooperative Economy" (Itçaina and Richez-Battesti, 2018), the action of SSE organisations allows a transcendence of traditional, historically dated relations between State and Market. It is part, on a meso-economic scale, of a process designed to adapt to economic and social change in response to socio-cultural aspirations and local development. Here we can also see the emergence of new arrangements, institutionalised under the effect of social interactions at local and regional level (Lévesque, 2016). The part played by the SSE organisations in the roll-out of a territory-based collective action will, in any case, assume various forms in the responses given to the expectations of populations with regard to proximity action. It will therefore be differentiated and nuanced in different ways in this work.

As Shinichi Saito, Munenori Nomura, Fumitoshi Mizutani and Francis Rawlinson say for Japan, this advanced country, concerned by the ageing of its population, has to maintain the provision of socially sustainable public services. Only the public sector is unable to produce sufficiently, by its own resources, public goods or commons the social utility of which is essential in the eyes of populations and public authorities; to do so it must seek support from the SSE and from private enterprises. The chapter by Andrea Salustri and Federica Viganò also shows how, in a country such as Italy, cooperation between non-profit SSE organisations, the public sector and the private sector takes shape via institutional arrangements that allow reduction of social and territorial inequalities. The deployment of PSSEPs is also analysed by Philippe Bance, Jean-Philippe Milésy and Christelle Zagbayou as a many-sided phenomenon of cooperations between public organisations, in particular the public, enterprises, and SSE organisations so as to guarantee the provision of new services. For them, the rise of these PSSEPs means a break with the traditional centralist conception of public action according to the French model.

The benefits of the PSSEPs roll-out are not only those maintaining or preserving the production of public goods. They also allow the expansion of production through the mobilisation of commons. In this respect, Ancuța Vameșu, Cristina Barna and Irina Opincaru show, in the forestry sector in the Romanian context of transition towards the market economy, that the deployment of commons answers some major

issues for collective action: those of sustainable development and the mobilisation of players in this perspective.

However, the mobilisation of commons to recast public action does not necessarily proceed in such a way as to meet the essential social needs expressed within territories. This is particularly the case for Colombia; Juan Fernando Álvarez, Miguel Gordo Granados and Hernando Zabala Salazar call our attention to the underproduction of public goods and commons in the health sector. Intensive recourse to market mechanisms, problems of governance and the absence of institutional recognition of SSE organisations deny disadvantaged populations the benefits of health protection, despite the fact that this could be provided for them in a more satisfactory manner by greater recourse to the commons and to the mutualist sector in particular. The finding of opportunities offered by the SSE but not sufficiently turned to good account in the current forms of expression of collective action is also established for Algeria. In point of fact, Malika Ahmed Zaïd shows that the nascent field of the SSE in the Kabyle country could really take off, could embark upon a constructive upward trend assuring the progressive affirmation of networks throughout the territory and trigger a process allowing the involvement of players in the construction of public policies.

In the different territories explored in this work, the PSSEPs also constitute a vital source of reworking of collective action through the innovations that they carry and in their contribution to the development of territorial ecosystems. Jean-Claude Boual and Cathy Zadra-Veil show that, in France, the *Sociétés coopératives d'intérêt collectif* and the *Living Labs* are emergent organisational forms that, by their hybrid character, bringing together various stakeholders, public and private alike, place their hopes in participative governance to boost innovation and enterprise at local and regional level. Pascal Glémoin, for his part, considers the interest of other forms of SSE organisation through their contribution to sustainable local development: enterprises for social integration through employment. They play an important part in the planning and fitting out of the territory by promoting integration through work, again bringing together the players, public and private alike, to dialogue, to learn and to innovate, so providing tools for action in the service of territorial needs.

All so many innovating devices that show, like the works conducted in Quebec (Bouchard, 2013), the opportunities that might be represented for local or national public authorities armed with a real sense of proactive purpose, mobilising the stakeholders and organisations at local level so as to energise the territorial ecosystems. This can sometimes also be done, by the way, as in Europe, jointly with public authorities at local-to-regional level, in what is called multilevel governance<sup>3</sup> (Bance, 2016). This can be considered as a collective organisation model

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<sup>3</sup> Christiansen (1996) defines multilevel governance as “non-hierarchical systems of negotiation, regulation and administration going beyond the traditional acceptance of the hierarchical sovereign State as the final arena for the taking of decisions and resolution of conflicts”.

aimed at meeting the essential needs of the population in the framework of what Jacques Fournier (2013) calls the “economy of needs”.

However, the noticed changes are not without impact on the behaviour of the players.

### **3. Behavioural changes impacting on the PSSEPs, production of public goods and commons**

The changes induced by the new paradigm of collective action have given rise, in recent decades, to analyses about the behaviour of public organisations and the social economy. In the public sphere, beyond the privatisations, seeing the decrease of general-interest or economic policy missions assigned between the end of the war and the 1980s, public enterprises have adopted similar behaviours to those of private enterprises in the pursuit of viability; in other words, they tend to become largely similar (Bance, 1988), a phenomenon also referred to as behavioural trivialisation. This process of the increasing submission of public enterprises to a logic of market efficiency is the cause of a loss of own identity among public enterprises. Its magnitude was all the greater insofar as the national authorities no longer made public enterprises the instruments of public policy, seeking dividends there to add to their budgets; the States saw themselves obliged, as in Europe, to renounce the specificities of public enterprises under the effect of rigorous controls by the authorities of the Union, mindful of economic integration, which, to that end, to avoid distortions of competition, required enterprises (and Member States) to adopt the “behaviour of an informed investor in a market economy”, save in case of derogations in respect of perfectly defined public service missions financed through the public budget.

The standardisation of SSE organisations was also the subject of a number of studies, many of which draw their inspiration from the concept of “institutional isomorphism” introduced by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), which refers to three general factors of levelling-out of organisations: mimetic, coercive and normative. If these three factors are jointly applied to SSE organisations, their strong dependence as regards direct financing or material support of the public sector increases the significance of coercive standardisation. Under the effect of the NPM and the rationing of public spending, the SSE organisations are led – as was earlier the case for the public enterprises, but according to different modes of operation – to adopt new management norms that may be the cause of advanced loss of identity. The methods assessing the “social impact of social enterprises”, driven for instance in the EU by the European Commission and the lobbying by financial institutions, based partially on return-on-investment indicators (Alix and Baudet, 2014), could make an appreciable contribution in this respect.



As pointed out by Monique Combes-Joret, Laëtitia Lethielleux, and Anne Reimat, the process may make the organisations “lose their soul”. The process nevertheless, as things stand, as these authors’ analysis shows, differentiated effects on the capacity of organisations to contribute to the construction of programmes for collective action, given the fact of their greater or lesser scale and own capacities, to sway the attitude of the public authorities in the framework of the relations that they form with them.

However, the behavioural changes of public and SSE organisations do have as a whole profound repercussions for the PSSEPs. The instrumentalisation of organisations by the public authorities is very directly inspired by incentive theory and by the “new public economics”. In this single-centred perspective, based on a top down conception of public action, the State embodies a general interest the frame of reference of which is the market. This conception then leads the public authorities, rather than to seek to co-construct collective action with the partner organisations, to impose on the latter performance criteria largely inspired by private management. On the public enterprises side and, more particularly those with State capital, cooperation with the SSE organisations often also aims to mobilise the partners to guarantee the lowest cost of public service missions whilst meeting the expectations of public responsible authorities eager to increase their budgets through dividends.

The new public action paradigm does not impact only the PSSEPs. It also has considerable repercussions on the conception that the States form of public goods, their production and, consequently, the ways and means of their regulation. As Faruk Ülgen shows for the financial sector, collective action was, and remains, founded on the idea of market efficiency. This was the cause of the crisis of 2008, with resurgence remaining possible with the present form of prudential regulation of financial markets. It would be necessary to eradicate this to place oneself in an extra-commercial perspective that does not position collective action as resulting from the interest of private players on the market but, rather, sets objectives for sustainable economic and human development and sets up public and democratic structures of governance to that end.

As Manuel Belo Moreira explains, however, making the model evolve is an uphill struggle, since the hegemony of the neoliberal ideology and the financialisation of the economy at worldwide level are so far gone that neither the economic crisis of 2008 nor the most unwelcome effects of the model sparked any real questions, any more than did the deployment of for-profit conceptions of the action of commercial public or social-economy organisations.

The PSSEPs nonetheless offer advantages of a kind likely to initiate the reworking of collective action.

#### **4. The benefits of PSSEPs for the co-construction of collective action**

The involvement of SSE organisations in the development of public policies is an area of study that has attracted growing interest for some years now (Barbier, 2017). Judging by the analyses in this work, the PSSEPs appear to be more generally major opportunities for the co-construction of collective action, giving it foundations so that it can break free of centralist, hierarchical conceptions, by permitting a complementarity of contributions.

Inspired by pragmatism, Alexandrine Lapoutte thus considers that the mobilisation of commons and SSE organisations is likely to transform collective action through the specificities of governance that they carry and through the interactions that they trigger between concerned parties. The resultant participative approach is analysed as a promising way of renewal for public policies around an increasing involvement of the concerned parties via production of public goods and commons.

Indeed, here we can see, adopting Bernard Paranque's conception, an ideal type of search for solutions negotiated by the players, a taking into account social aspirations of populations and a cocreation of what he calls a common patrimony. By allowing the stakeholders to find a form of expression of their own, is created a sense of confidence around a shared vision within the framework of deliberating processes. For this to happen, the action requires the mobilisation of adapted methods and tools of governance.

However, care must be taken to avoid the co-construction of collective action being hampered by conflicts between the stakeholders, preventing the development of partnerships and, by extension, the joint production of public goods and commons via the PSSEPs. As Yves Vaillancourt (2008) demonstrates in Quebec, a democratic co-construction would allow the development of partnerships so that collective action could be mobilised in a balanced way among the various stakeholders so as to promote the general interest.

Against this backdrop, Pierre Bauby maps the forms of governance likely to found collective action on the basis of partnership mechanisms. To meet the economic and social needs and expectations of populations, the democratic debate is necessary with all the stakeholders (citizens, users, organisations of the civil society and representatives of economic, social and cultural activities). The co-construction of collective action should therefore follow a logic of confrontation of alternative projects or solutions, set in a democratic framework, whilst pursuing an action that is ascending rather than hierarchical. It is a matter of prerequisites allowing the correct expression of the expectations of populations and satisfaction of the needs that constantly evolve. In his opinion, however, there is no single solution in the matter that can be applied everywhere and in all circumstances. The particular conditions of implementing collective action governance depend on the specific cultures that are those of different territories. The democratic debate takes on highly diverse forms in

apprehending the needs (public consultation and debate, complaints, elections of users' committees, ...). It may proceed according to modes of participation, which are themselves also variable (meetings, referendums, on-line expression, public meetings, ...).

Seen thus, the PSSEPs set up on the scale of the territory are tools for the reconstruction of public action on the basis of democratic debate, and this for several reasons. First of all, they allow the expression of needs by association with the stakeholders and by allowing public authorities, hybrid organisations, public and SSE, to debate their apprehension on these territories. They, therefore, constitute vectors of formalisation of those needs by confrontating divergent points of view to lead on to the production of public goods or commons. They offer responses to the expectations of populations by their co-production or joint production, often allowing a guarantee of expansion of provision of public services. These partnerships also place in synergy the players in the territories, as shown in various chapters of this work, by bringing extra energy to the territorial ecosystems through the innovations that they often carry.

These advantages and the involvement of the civil society in the PSSEPs do not exempt them from evaluation to appreciate the relevance of the solutions that they bring to the implementation of collective action. They are, in actual fact, the product of sometimes contradictory interests that may lead to recommendations or to implementations that are, at the end of the day, out of alignment with the social needs. The evaluation methods, inspired by standard economic analysis, for example contingent evaluation, are not to be dismissed out of hand as long as they bring an exterior view based on the criteria of a scientific methodology, but with three main provisos: maintaining a critical distance with regard to the frame of reference of market and monetisation of the advantages that founds those methods; apprehending them only as tools among others that must be crossed with participative and pluralist methods so as to appreciate their real scope (Bance and Chassy, 2017); steering clear of approaches driven by lobbying and a doctrinaire vision of collective action that, in fine, yields to the interests of all-powerful public players or decision-makers.

Finally, we must analyse the role played by the PSSEPs with regard to the transformation of public action.

## **5. The PSSEPs in the process of creative destruction of collective action**

To analyse the role of the PSSEPs it is helpful, following the lead of Joseph Schumpeter (1943), to introduce at this point a new concept: the creative destruction of collective action. This is understood as a process of disappearance and creation over time of forms of intervention by public authorities that might lead to a radical modification of collective action, known as paradigm change. In the light of that

concept, we shall try to describe the situation of the PSSEPs in the current transformations of forms of action in order to specify their place as a component of a collective action paradigm.

Before the 1980s, collective action was dominated by the figure of sovereign States embodying the general will. They had extensive room for manoeuvre to pursue their economic policies, both in terms of monetary, budget and industrial policy and in terms of instruments of direct action to produce public goods and serve as instruments for collective action. Institutional forms may vary from one country to the next, ranging from the Nation State to a multiplicity of institutions exercising the public prerogatives, but the collective action paradigm leaves little room for other organisations to promote the general interest. The SSE organisations, therefore, see themselves eclipsed, not appearing at all as any important vector of collective action, and this quite particularly in the more centralist countries.

The incapacity of States, and their instruments of action, to remedy the economic and social crisis that the advanced economic experienced for several decades, the growing economic interdependence due to the globalisation of markets and the preponderant rule of neoliberalism have proved the undoing of the earlier paradigm. The process of destruction of preexisting forms of collective action and the coming of new forms thereof has birthed the present collective action paradigm worldwide. The transformations under way, however, are not uniform, and national traditions may yet explain the persistence of differences. As shown by Bernard Enjolras, Benoît Lévesque and Bernard Thiry (2008), Yves Vaillancourt (2008), there are systems of governance and modes of construction of public policy that differentiate one country from another. In that respect this takes us back to the wisdom of the theory of the variety of capitalism (Amable, 2005). There are now only two main lines of force that characterise the current world process of the creative destruction of public or collective action.

The most fundamental one is the affirmation of a commercial conception of the general interest that tends, on the worldwide scale, to standardise collective action against the yardstick of markets in connection with their globalisation. This finds expression in a sizeable withdrawal as regards direct public intervention and in the deployment of forms of self-regulation, the market fundamentalism in the finance sector being the most radical form, posing a thorny problem for the regulation of this world public asset after the devastating effects of the crisis of 2008. Mention may also be made in this connection of the falling-back on the PPPs and widespread reliance on patterns of public behaviour standardised by the private sector characterising, in its central corpus, the NPM and the standardisation or levelling-down of organisations mobilised by the public authorities via, among other things, new regulation norms and performance criteria inspired by private management.

The second line of force starts out from the installation of new forms of collective action, completing those of the States, which have lost much in the way of capability.

This dimension now has two essential aspects. The first has to do with creating other levels of collective action, in particular through the agency of supranational or infranational authorities (e.g., the regions), by jointly conducting collective action in connection with the form of governance known as multilevel (Bance, 2016). The second concerns support from the SSE organisations as a form of expression of the general interest on the basis of their own perimeters for implementation. This involves a complex architecture of nesting of various levels of taking account of the general interest within different “perimeters of solidarity” (Monnier and Thiry, 1997). This spurs the development of economies called plural, in which partnership relations are complex and based on the placing of the players in complementarity whilst also following, as explained earlier, a logic of substitution given the fact of the retreat of direct public action.

In this paradigm the PSSEPs allow, as the analyses in this work reveal, the production of public goods and commons, a modulated implementation of collective action in the service of the general interest, drawing support from the expression of variable-geometry social solidarities, bringing innovation at local and regional level to develop territorial ecosystems and trying out the co-construction of collective action. So we might then “mobilise both registers of solidarity by combining redistributive solidarity and a more reciprocal solidarity in order to boost society’s capacity for self-organisation” (Laville, 2004, p. 191).

The first logic of commercial standardisation, which is inherent in the current public or collective action paradigm, does, however, press towards the instrumentalisation of organisations in a near-commercial perspective. It brings about the loss of identity of public or social economy organisations and players. It also tends to sow the seeds of doubt as to the benefits of a collective, pluralist management of public goods or commons and to hamper the roll-out of co-construction of collective action.

The PSSEPs have their seeds too – thanks in particular to experiences with the co-construction of collective action and social innovation in the territories that they carry – to the emergence of a change of collective action paradigm. This latter should then be able to draw on a deep citizen involvement in the development and implementation of public or collective action, finding support in the public and SSE organisations, in order to facilitate the participative expression and specification of social needs in the context of an expanded production of public goods and commons.

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