



The Partnership in Social and Solidarity Economy: from Contract to Alliance. A case study.

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ABSTRACT

Among development policies, social and solidarity economy (SSE) practices are taking on increasing importance. These practices are characterised by the development of 'relational wealth' in addition to material and financial wealth and in particular the relationship of reciprocity (Polanyi 1944; Servet 2007). In this context, the notion of alliance becomes highly significant. This refers to various forms of partnerships forged by the parties involved. Nonetheless, very different, and sometimes even opposite, relational logics underlying these partnerships can be observed. We suggest comparing two different partnership logics: the *contract* logic and the *alliance* logic. The analysis is made in relation to the study of a large French SSE organisation operating in the field of sport.

Keywords: alliance, contract, partnership, social and solidarity economy, organisation.

RESUME

Dans le contexte des politiques de développement, les pratiques associées à l'économie sociale et solidaire (ESS) prennent de plus en plus de place. Or ces pratiques se caractérisent par la mise en valeur d'une richesse « relationnelle » en plus de la richesse matérielle et financière, et en particulier par la relation de réciprocité (Polanyi 1944; Servet 2007). La notion d'alliance acquiert dans ce cadre une signification de grande importance. Elle renvoie aux différentes formes de partenariat établies entre les acteurs associés. On constate pourtant, dans ces partenariats, des logiques relationnelles très différentes, voire même opposées. Nous proposons de comparer deux logiques de partenariat : celle du *contrat* et celle de l'*alliance*. L'analyse se fera en lien avec une étude réalisée au sein d'une grande structure française de l'ESS travaillant dans le domaine du sport.

Mots-clés : Alliance, contrat, partenariat, économie sociale et solidaire, organisation.

JEL Classification: A13, L14.

1. INTRODUCTION

Among development policies, social and solidarity economy (SSE) practices are taking on increasing importance. SSE is often presented as a curative or restorative economy that fills market or public policy gaps by providing access to certain goods or services for communities which are remote from them (French Law N°2014-856 of 31 July 2014 on the social and solidarity economy, article 2). This approach echoes the economic theories of Non-Profit Organisations, which explain the role of those organisations through their responses to the failure of the State (Weisbrod 1977, 1988) and the market (Ben-Ner 1986; Hansmann 1979; Nelson et Krashinsky 1973).

Another way of looking at SSE practices focuses more on their specificities, without necessarily drawing explicit comparisons to market or state practices, especially their democratic and participatory nature (Parodi 1999 and French Law on the SSE, article 1). This vision echoes two schools of thought, a socio-economic one relating to *social* economy and a socio-political one relative to the *solidarity* economy.

At the same time, these practices are characterised by the development of ‘relational wealth’ in addition to material and financial wealth: as a reaction to the anthropological crisis resulting from an ‘excess of individuation’ in modern times, individuation being the process by which the individual and its self-realisation have become more important than the bonds of the community. Citizens’ movements have emerged which aim not only to provide services to their community but also to create the community fabric that neither the State nor the market can replace and that churches, the family and traditional forms of socialisation no longer provide (Lipietz 2012).

This echoes an approach to the economy which can be described as anthropological and aims to restore its relational nature. The practices of the SSE are then studied to illustrate the plurality of dimensions of economic exchanges. The focus is put on the relationships which develops behind the exchange of goods and services and their gratuitous aspects. What is looked for is the ‘value of bond’ (*valeur de lien*) (Godbout 2009), the mutually beneficial interest which goes beyond calculating and satisfying individual interests.

This relational approach to the economy is characterised by the ‘paradigm of the Gift’ (Mauss 1923; Caillé 2000), in which the gift represents the ultimate ‘symbol of social life’ (Mauss 1923, 87). Exchanged things symbolise community ties, ‘*the communion and alliance which they establish are quite unbreakable*’ (Mauss 1923, 87). This paradigm is the basis of the notion of reciprocity, which Polanyi took up (Polanyi 1944) and which is used to define the specificity of the solidarity economy, so long as reciprocity is not reduced to a relationship of gifts / counter-gifts and is understood as the bringing together of partners who recognise themselves as dissimilar but complementary and interdependent within a non-standardising social whole (Servet 2014).

While the figure of the contract, as an agreement of the wishes made between free men, bases modernity, the SSE invites exploration of other relational logics which integrate the fundamentally relational nature of humans. This anthropological proposition, which emphasises a ‘logic of alliance’ behind contractual logics, is based on the observation of alternative socio-economic practices pertaining to the Solidarity Economy, such as

partnerships between farmers and local consumers of food or solidarity finance etc. (Lasida 2011). There, the logic of alliance appears as the first and the most obvious logic sought by the parties because it does not exist on the market.

However, the SSE is composed of a variety of other types of organised collective practices, which are not all as activists or innovative, such as for example organisations which operate on the markets and are first and foremost involved in contractual logics.

As part of an action-research within a prototypical French SSE organisation, we studied relationships forged with employees, customers and (business or public) partners. Although of a contractual nature, these relationships had a density which could not be apprehended through the existing theoretical frameworks applicable to contractual relations – which analyse relationships from the perspective of self-interest (particularly the contract theory). So how can this relational wealth be theoretically characterised?

Would the distinction between the *contract* logic and the *alliance* logic, which had already been suggested to analyse the Solidarity Economy practices expressly developed to throw off the dominant market model, be suitable for exploring the market relationships implemented within the SSE?

In the first section of this article, we present our research setting, namely the study of consumer, working and partnership relations within an SSE organisation. In the following section, we present the results of our research. In the final section, we introduce and discuss the conceptual framework emerging from our research, namely the distinction between the contract and the alliance in the relational practices of SSE. A concluding section completes the paper.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The data come from a study we conducted within a French organisation which wanted to strengthen its position in the SSE sector by assessing its social added value.

2.1. Research setting

The organisation we studied

This organisation promotes outdoor sports, offering sporting vacation and leisure activities in some 150 holiday centres and sports facilities across France, and offers sports trips in sixty or so countries. Its consolidated revenues amount to 250 million euros. It is composed of two main associations and several subsidiary companies (hereinafter ‘the associative group’) and employs between 2000 and 12000 people depending on the season.

A prototypical SSE organisation

It combines several characteristics of SSE organisations. From a legal standpoint, being an association makes it belong *de facto* to the SSE, under the Social and Solidarity Economy Act of 2014 as it meets the requirements of democratic governance (the ‘one person, one vote’ principle) and selfless management. It is the democratic aspect of the SSE which we perceive here.

From a socio-economic point of view, the way it operates and especially its capacity to link together the different principles of economic integration (Polanyi 1944; Servet 2007)

(namely the market, redistribution and reciprocity principles) also bring it closer to the SSE model.

First, it competes on the tourism and leisure market and behaves like a traditional company. It develops services which are sold to customers: holidays and sporting activities to individuals and sports facility design and management to local authorities. Within these market relationships, customers buy its services at a price which is at least equal to their cost of production.

Second, a part of the organisation's financial resources comes from redistribution. It is supported by public policies aimed at helping people go on holiday, allowing it to carry out activities intended for vulnerable groups. Schematically speaking, some of the organisation's programmes allow people with disabilities or on low incomes to benefit from its services, thanks to subsidies or aid covering the additional cost generated by the adjustment of services or the part of the price which cannot be paid. The beneficiaries then pay less than the cost of the service. It is the curative or restorative aim of the SSE which we perceive here.

The third economic principle underlying the organisation, reciprocity, can clearly be seen in the voluntary commitment of the members and administrators of the associative group. It is true, however, that reciprocity, or solidarity, did not appear to the stakeholders of the organisation as a central and crucial aspect of the project.

2.2.Action-research

It was reported that the staff was struggling to describe the associative project's solidarity dimension, other than by referring to the 'solidarity devices' intended to welcome vulnerable groups but aimed at a limited target audience. Moreover, the organisation conveyed a commercial rather than an associative image which did not help.

The model of the organisation was therefore questioned by some competitors from the for-profit private sector, and sometimes also by non-profit sector stakeholders, who considered that it was simply a mercantile player which, being an association with a statutory mission of public interest, benefits from public funds to the detriment of non-profit stakeholders and from tax exemptions to the detriment of competitors.

Therefore, its SSE positioning has proved to be an interesting step for the organisation in order to demonstrate that economic value creation and social purpose are not contradictory and can even go hand in hand. To strengthen the legitimacy of its positioning in the SSE sector, in 2015, the organisation set up an action-research with us in order to clarify whether and how this organisation fell within the SSE and to identify its specific social value. The researchers and the management of the organisation collectively set the objectives of the action-research. Its main purpose was to assess the organisation's social utility. The aim was to identify the organisation's impact on society, not only regarding the solutions provided to social problems but also in terms of its influence on representations and social institutions.

Our purpose here is not to expand on the concept of social utility developed during this action-research or the evaluation methodology we created and implemented.¹ It should be

¹ Articles are being written on these topics by the Research Group on the Evaluation of Social Utility (GREUS), to which the authors belong. A practical methodological document has been drafted: see

noted, however, that in our eyes assessing social utility means researching and giving value to the identity of an organisation. This approach enables the organisation to clarify the basis of its actions – the meaning that the various players give to their collective action – and thus to offer a new perspective on the results of the organisation's activities.

Giving priority to the anthropological and relational approach to SSE, we mainly focused on how people experience relationships within this organisation (namely relationship with the self, relationship with others, relationship with the world) as a source of knowledge about the organisation's relational anthropology.

As the fieldwork and analysis progressed, the richness and density of the relationships which developed within this organisation appeared, regardless of the status of the people involved in these relationships (employees, customers and partners), even though their origin was commercial. We went back through the action-research data, in order to study the reciprocity dimension of market relations established by this SSE organisation (working or consumer relations) and assessed the extent to which this reciprocity dimension had influenced, coloured and specified them.

2.3. Data collection

During the first stage, we conducted *a series of eight internal meetings* with a working group composed of managers, executive directors and members of the Board of directors to determine the meaning they collectively gave to the organisation's social project. The formulation which emerged helped to characterise the originality of the organisation's project, through the description of *four types of relationships* people experience in the organisation (relationships with the self, with others, with the collective and with society) as well as a *central experience* which particularly characterised its social value. This formulation is the result of a back-and-forth between discussions conducted within the working group and re-readings of these exchanges by the researchers.

This work culminated in the characterisation of the organisation's social utility as being its ability to provide its stakeholders with an experience of a flexible and non-prescriptive sociability. It takes the form of mostly ephemeral relationships but of such intensity that they create a sense of common belonging, beyond the atomisation of ordinary experience. This extra-ordinary experience, out of everyday life, makes it possible to reinvest differently one's daily life. In a society of claimed singularities, the challenge is to live together. To a certain extent, the organisation, through the implementation of its educational and sports project, allows its users to experience a flexible collective that enhances singularities.

These initial results were presented to various internal bodies (the working group, the management committee, the board of directors and various departments) which, at this stage, validated them.

During the second stage, we conducted a series of *ten seminars with key stakeholders* (employees, local partners, users, national partners) to listen to their perceptions and challenge this initial formulation. We met and set up dialogue between nearly 80 people,

with a methodology ensuring that everyone contributed to the debate. All meetings were recorded, transcribed in full and analysed.

We also collected data in several other ways (sixty in-depth interviews with employees and customers, participant observation, study of documents, books, broadcasts, archives and two surveys with 1600 respondents).

2.4. Data analysis

For this article, we used data from the second stage of the action-research.

During the second stage, when expanding the discussion to stakeholders of the organisation, we first asked for their spontaneous perception of the organisation's social utility and their fundamental experiences within it, and then we presented and discussed the results of the first stage. The exchanges were recorded, transcribed and coded in order to analyse in greater depth the relational experiences identified during the first stage.

Then we presented these enriched results to different bodies of the organisation to gather their observations (nearly 70 individuals who had participated in the work or who were discovering it). Apart from a few corrections to the wording, they considered that the results reflected their experiences within the organisation.

In the context of this article, we have taken over the data from this second stage, and in particular those coded under the relational experience named 'relationship with the collective', a category which included all data on customer relations (customer-organisation relations, customer-community of customers relations), work relations (employee-employer relations and employees-community of employees relations) and partnerships (commercial or not). We reread them, drawing a distinction between the data relating to the experiences of customers, employees, partners in fulfilment of their contractual expectations and those relating to actual experiences that were not contractually expected.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Consumer relations

Customer expectations

The expectations of the customers who come to this organisation are quite simple: they want to spend active holidays and play sports. It is a question of exerting themselves, physically and mentally, getting fit or staying in shape.

The expectation for comprehensive and affordable support

They could organise their own sports trip and go by themselves or choose a competing organisation, but they choose this organisation which offers a package of all-inclusive services for affordable and transparent prices: the 'all-in' option is really all-inclusive, without any unpleasant surprises, the sports equipment is available, meals are ready, break times and parties are organised, and it is possible to use an *ad hoc* transport service to get to the sites from most French cities etc.

A learning purpose: progression in sport

They want to discover a sporting activity or to progress in an activity which they already

practise. They spend a week discovering several sports to have fun or on the contrary intensively train in a particular sport with an instructor, to ensure good progress. Education in this case is considered as the teaching of sports techniques which allow people to rapidly practise a sport or to improve in outdoor sports, as safely as possible.

The collective dimension perceived as unavoidable

Customers coming for the first time know more or less that they are signing up for communal life, whether in the sports centre or in the sports practice group. This communal dimension is sometimes actively looked for by some customers who want to escape an occasional or more regular solitude and not be alone during their holidays. Nevertheless, this collective dimension is generally considered as a non-controllable given. The pooling of equipment and spaces (rooms are collective) is perceived as a necessity to be able to practise these sports at reasonable prices.

These different elements – easy access to outdoor sports, progress in sports, communal sports practice – correspond to a first level of understanding of the ‘core business’ which is claimed by the organisation, namely that of sports educator for all. It refers to a rather instrumental conception of the relationship according to which relations are at the service of individual sport.

Valued experience

However, when we explore what is happening in a sports centre run by this organisation, customers value a wide variety of other elements.

Through the pooling of spaces, a Common is created based on the sharing of life experiences and knowledge.

In this organisation, during a sports camp, customers share living spaces: the rooms are communal, they eat together and get ready in shared locker rooms. These spaces where one physically interacts with others are fundamentally linked to the intimate area of life (the table, the bedroom, the dressing room) and ideally stimulate initial discussion.

Customers highlight the ease with which, in this organisation, they relate to people they do not know. According to them, the relationship seems less formal than in other organisations. In particular, people are on first name terms, between customers but also with the staff, and call everybody ‘tu’ (the familiar form of address in French).

Sport is the first Common which connects people: customers gather around the same passion for sport. The activity which they have just practised together – the first experience they have in common – gives rise to basic exchanges on the level of everyone's experience in the discipline, the equipment used, the techniques implemented, the emotions experienced... discussions which will then continue when affinities appear, through the exchange of more personal experiences on each one's life course. People listen to others, they talk about themselves, confide in others, exchange points of view.

They also share and pool knowledge. They both learn from others and teach others. The circulation of knowledge creates a solidarity network open to all, which is constantly enriched by the participation of new people, regardless of their level of expertise or their social status. Inversion rites take place, roles are blurred: customers become monitors for advice, explanation.

In this organisation, the sharing of intimate spaces and the exchange of experience, know-how and skills through sport bring together generations, cultures and socio-professional environments. They also contribute to a mutual enrichment: everyone goes home with a part of this Common.

Behind individual sport practised in groups, communal action is the fabric of belonging.

The practice of outdoor sports places people in a permanent game with natural obstacles – terrain, currents, weather... – and personal boundaries – fear and despondency. By facing the unknown and the unexpected, we live an adventure in the manner of a game (outside the sphere of utility) and of a gamble since this adventure requires strong commitment, without insurance or guarantee as to its results.

Outdoor sports invite everyone to adapt in real time to each situation. Facing a new situation, one must change tack. But in this organisation, this individual experience (outdoor sports are essentially individual sports) is experienced in a group. The collective nature of this adventure, which at first seems to add a dimension to the unknown, proves to be the very condition of its success. The group can collectively cope with the unexpected and continue the effort.

In ski touring, we arrived at the summit, which was a bit difficult for me, but I ended up getting there. I felt I'd surpassed myself a bit... It's something I could not have done alone. (A customer)

Every new situation, problematic or not, desirable or not, becomes a new horizon to act together and to mobilise the diversity of the group's resources in a new configuration. There is no fixed group dynamics (which success depends on compliance with a set of rules), but there are multiple solutions tailored to every situation.

There is a certain type of communication at the heart of communal action management: the potential risk in a sports activity generates direct communication between participants in order to quickly coordinate with others. Customers discover a no-frills and straightforward communication which efficiently builds relationships based on trust.

Communal action around sport places all the participants on an equal footing. It unites their differences. The distance between instructors and customers fades away: everyone can contribute to the adventure, according to his/her abilities.

The ephemeral group which is created is fragile in nature. It can disintegrate if it does not meet individual expectations or if a member does not get involved to the same extent as others. On the other hand, the recognition of everyone's contribution to the group is crucial to cohesion and the creation of a sense of belonging.

Originally coming to practise outdoor sports with ease as part of an "all-inclusive" stay, customers are immersed in a collective action they become part of. Thus, everyone becomes co-responsible for the success of the collective action but also of their own experience. When the dynamic works, the customers are no longer simply in a logic of consumption but become the actors of an event which they accept that they cannot fully control as it depends on a collective dynamic which can potentially fail.

The communal action which customers experience starts with a gamble which is resolved through mutual aid and solidarity experienced in a real way. It allows the experimentation of a tangible interdependence which marks the participants.

Beyond sports progression, experience another possible relationship with the world.

Interdependence forged in action is undoubtedly a key part of sport progression: it encourages people to continue the effort, it stimulates the exchange of technical tips etc. Therefore, it helps the organisation to meet the educational expectations of sports trips consumers.

However, for some customers, this experience opens new horizons. It can 'transform' people, positively shaking their achievements and certainties up, and enable them to shape their personality from this relational experience, possibly taking another look at their life, experimenting and building new values. We provide some fairly clear examples below.

In some customers, this experience provokes an introspective experience sometimes followed by a change of direction in their life:

After a stay here a trainee phoned saying 'I left, I have a void, something is lacking, I'm home alone. I no longer have that passion which I had with the whole group' (An employee)

I tell trainees: 'there we will take the air bag', they are not confident, but I push them to go further. I put them in a successful situation and then they do things they did not know how to do. It worked so well that after that, a trainee sent me a text message saying 'You changed my life, I left my guy because things were not going well between us and I didn't dare to say it. I changed everything, I found another job...' (An employee)

Interdependence can also be experimented in relation to oneself and to nature:

I was alone before the immensity of the mountain, facing the Mont Blanc. I felt infinitely small in front of this infinitely vast world. And I felt free for the first time in my life. Nothing mattered, just be there and enjoy that special moment. Yes, I can say that it was one of the most beautiful moments I have experienced, and I still think about it from time to time. (A customer)

The activity of sports educator then takes on its full dimension. It is not only about teaching sports but also enabling people to 'feel alive' (Customer) in exploring other kinds of relationships with oneself, with other and with the world.

3.2. Working relations

Employee expectations

Employees expect that the provisions of their employment contract are complied with. They are attached to their working conditions: payment on time, respect of working hours, training etc. In addition, employees are often sports enthusiasts and the opportunity to practise their sport (and to discover new ones during their career) is one of the key aspects encouraging them to choose this organisation even when the salary is considered as low.

The experience employees value

The sense of belonging, heart of commitment

The employees work a lot and, generally, do more than they would do elsewhere and, in many cases, for lower pay than they could earn elsewhere (as freelance instructors or in other companies). When we explore the reasons which motivate them to do so, they answer: the group spirit, the team cohesion, the feeling of belonging to a family, of living a 'collective

venture' in which everyone is recognised, acts and flourishes. It is the sense of interdependence, or reciprocity, linked to conviviality that comes first. This feeling is usually linked to an erasure of hierarchy.

The associative project, foundation of team spirit and support for personal commitment

Once recruited, the employees discover the associative project. They value the organisation's capacity to promote sport, make outdoor sports accessible to a wide community and encourage social diversity in the centres. They discover that the concrete implementation of these aspirations rests on them and, given the limited means of an association, on their goodwill and their ability to improvise.

For instance, instructors at a mountain centre had not been warned that a group of participants in a skiing week were disabled. Therefore, they could not take them skiing since they were inadequately staffed. On the last day of the week, they finally managed to improvise a hike in what was one of the most ambitious areas from a sports viewpoint soliciting all the centre monitors.

Reciprocity of commitment

However, commitment is relational and requires reciprocity. They only continue to commit if all parties do the same. In some places, this sense of mutual commitment, between employer and employee, was 'hurt' and the desire for involvement eroded. The employees deplored the fact that, during internal meetings, the activities' profitability has become the predominant topic whereas the main topic used to be optimal organisation in order to provide good sport. They regretted the growing distance between the management teams and the field teams. Seasonal workers deplored the establishment of short-term contracts corresponding to the exact period of workload peaks, whereas previously the seasonal contracts had been longer, allowing them to alternate busy work periods and less busy periods to rebalance the workload. This alternation was essential to allow teams to freely practise different sports as announced when they were hired. For its part, the management regretted that these employees demanded payment for every working hour and reproached them for 'playing for time'. The commitment cannot be unilateral, the employees answered in substance.

For employees, the most symbolic issue concerned the end of the free coffee. Indeed, since the organisation began operating, employees of holiday centres could go to the bar and have a coffee. This possibility has been recently removed in some centres. It is not a matter of acquired advantage that was abolished, it is not the price of coffee that mattered, it is the recognition of belonging to a community that was thus removed. This free coffee symbolised belonging to a team driven by a dynamic and collective project.

One goes beyond one's contractual commitment when there is a reciprocal relationship between the employer and the employee. On the side of employees, this commitment is based on little things: in particular, the possibility of trying out sport equipment, trying different sports, drinking coffee for free...

3.3. Interinstitutional partnerships

Partner expectations

Partners approach the organisation mostly because it is known throughout the country, has a reputation of being professional and has a strong financial foundation.

The experience that partners value

The partners experiment, with the organisation, a partnership of a particular nature, as it goes beyond the classic models, namely the market model and the public service model, and serves the community in another way. The partners are marked by the flexibility and the goodwill of the teams, always accommodating.

Tomorrow morning I have four pallets of water arriving by truck [at the site managed by the organisation where the partner is organising an event], I am not on site, I call [the organisation team] to explain the issue and the answer is *'no problem, we will manage it, we will find a solution'*. If we had asked a private company for it, they would have answered: *'it will cost you this much.'* (a partner)

For partners, this combination of professionalism and flexibility allows the organisation to innovate in order to meet the needs of the partnership. The partnership with the organisation is part of a 'collective venture' resulting in a joint and unique construction, rather than a transaction, an exchange of good practices.

[The organisation team] offer to carry out an initiative with a group of children who couldn't pay for admission to the pool. They want to set up an entire operation, we rack our brains to know how we will finance this while remaining in perfect legality. [...] We almost always find solutions together. Each time these are 'small keys' but if we do not find the 'small keys', we miss out. (a Public partner)

For partners, several pillars are constitutive of this experience: shared values, the organisation's ability to address and adapt to all, its ability to use the diversity of its resources to create new and tailored solutions, its professionalism, and the quality of the human relationships which underpins the partnership, characterised by a simplicity and a fluidity of relations as well as the availability, the readiness to listen, the open-mindedness and the loyalty of the teams. In this partnership approach, reliance is placed more on trust than on a formal and contractual framework that usually reassures partners.

4. DISCUSSION

From these results, we return to the question asked at the beginning about the type of relationships identified in activities of the SSE with a strong market component. The results obtained highlight a relational logic of alliance at the very heart of the commercial exchange. This study thus allows us to look more closely at the meaning of each of the two relational logics – that of the contract and that of the alliance – and at the same time, to better analyse their articulation and interdependence. In doing so, the study confirms the identification of the SSE as a 'relational economy'.

In order to better characterise and identify what the study of this SSE organisation reveals concerning the logic of contract and the logic of alliance, we will look to two mythical narratives which show in a pictorial and symbolic way each of these relational logics. The first narrative is a classic of the philosophy of the social contract: it is Hobbes's theory of

Leviathan. The second narrative belongs to a different disciplinary and literary genre: it is the creation of man and woman in the biblical book of Genesis. This double reference was inspired by the study carried out on the contract and alliance by the philosopher Adela Cortina (Cortina 2005), which we have already analysed in a general book on the SSE (Lasida 2011).

After reviewing the characteristics of the contract and the alliance that emerge through these mythical stories, we will confront them with the results of our study. On each occasion, we will ask ourselves a triple question to differentiate more precisely the logic of the contract from that of the alliance and, at the same time, better define their articulation and interdependence:

- What do we exchange?
- How do we exchange?
- What produces the exchange?

4.1. The contract from the Leviathan

Leviathan is a fictional figure which would have resulted from the first social contract between humans as Thomas Hobbes imagined it. The birth of society thus appears as the result of a voluntary act of humans. The Leviathan is a ‘monster’, an artificial human, bigger and stronger than natural, to which humans agree to submit in order to live together without killing each other. Hobbes's theory is based on the idea that man is inherently violent and rapacious, always seeking to seize what others have. It is therefore mutual fear that drives humans to subscribe to a contract.

What we exchange

Through the contract associated with the Leviathan, we exchange submission for protection. Humans agree to submit to a superior being, who in exchange will protect everyone from the potential violence of other humans.

The way of exchanging

The contract involves the joint definition of standards and laws that the parties agree to respect. Respect for these norms and laws is based on coercion and the threat of punishment.

What the exchange produces

The kind of exchange conveyed by the Leviathan is based on reciprocal mistrust. The contract does not dissolve mistrust, but it provides a means of regulating it. The contract thus produces a certain social order which makes it possible for people who consider themselves to be mutually threatened to live together. The contract therefore produces social order and individual protection.

4.2. The alliance from the book of Genesis

If Hobbes' theory uses fiction to explain the origin of human society, the book of Genesis in the Bible also uses fiction to tell the origin of human life. It is the creation by God of the first man and the first woman. At the beginning there is the creation of a being belonging to humankind (*ha'adam*) but without its sex being determined. God then finds that this human being suffers from loneliness and decides to put him asleep to remove a rib and thus creates the woman. It is the appearance of the woman that makes the original human being become a man (*ish*). The relationship between man and woman created in this way takes the form of an

alliance.

In relation to this story, we cannot strictly speak of an exchange. Yet it pertains to a relationship, or rather the setting up of a relationship from an act of creation. And the characteristics of this relationship can be applied to the exchange, thus making it possible to differentiate an exchange associated with an alliance from a contract type exchange.

What we exchange

The woman is created from a rib removed from the man and it is the creation of the woman which then gives the man an identity. Each one brings something to the other. But it is incompleteness which is at the origin of the relation and not the possession of a skill or an object which one is ready to exchange. What characterises this relationship, rather than exchange, is the pooling of what is lacking.

The way of exchanging

To create the woman, God will put the man to sleep. The origin of their lives and their relationship is not the result of their will and will remain a mystery to them. It is the 'demastery', their acceptance that they cannot control everything, which makes the alliance relationship possible.

What the exchange produces

The alliance relationship produces interdependence and mutual recognition. The common lack which is at the origin of the alliance becomes a common destiny.

This differentiation between contract and alliance requires a clarification concerning the contract theory developed in economics in response to issues of asymmetric or incomplete information, and moral hazard.² In this context, the contract theory refers to trust. However, trust appears there in a very different way from alliance: it is used as a strategy to maximize individual interest in a situation of uncertainty. On the contrary, in the alliance, trust is not the result of a calculation in order to maximize individual interest, but the result of a shared bet made in front of a common lack.

4.3. The contract and the alliance in the organisation studied

We will now take over the results presented above, attained in the evaluation of the social utility of the organisation studied, and analyse them in terms of alliance and contract, keeping the perspective of the three questions asked about the exchange.

What we exchange

The *contract* logic appears clearly in the three types of relations mentioned: with the customers, with the employees and with the partners. Each time there is an exchange of services for money (price or salary) that seems well framed and appreciated for the transparency, quality and completeness of the services, especially in the relationship with customers. One element seems to characterise the contract with the customers: the offer of a service accessible to the greatest number of people, whether in relation to cost or to customers' physical capacities. In all three cases, it is a question of a commercial exchange whose compliance with the terms agreed by each party is valued.

² Especially, see the Transaction costs theory (R. Coase, D. Williamson), et the Theory of games (J. von Neumann et O. Morgenstern).

But in all three cases, the exchange is not limited to the service provided. Each time there is more than one exchange, there is a pooling of what is lacking, giving way, at the same time, to a logic of *alliance*. The collective learning of an individual sport makes people share loneliness, fear and risk, in addition to knowledge. It is a joint action rather than just mutual aid. It is a 'collective venture' rather than simply mutual assistance. It is in this sense that we are talking about 'pooling' rather than exchange. We also find this dimension in the employment relationship. Employees seem ready to work beyond the contract granted because they value being part of the same family. We can say that, beyond the exchange of labour for wages, they share a search for a common identity. Finally, regarding the relationship with partners, the exchange of services always seems to be able to adjust to the constraints and needs of the community. We exchange benefits, but above all we share the concerns of the community we want to serve.

The way of exchanging

In all three types of relationship, the *contract* benefits from clear terms, as already mentioned. The respect of the organisation's commitments and a good reputation also favour the contractual relationship. Customers appreciate the instructors' expertise, the availability of equipment, the security provided, and the sharing which make the price accessible (especially the sharing of rooms).

As for the exchanges, or rather the pooling, associated with the *alliance*, one could say that it is the communal logic that makes it possible. At the level of the customers, each person says that they are carried by the group, and not only accompanied by the instructor. And the shared room, which in terms of contract is simply considered as a way of lowering the cost, becomes here a possible opening to a relationship that is not known in advance and not chosen. What makes the alliance possible, therefore, is the opposite of the contract: it is the 'de-mastery' and letting go. In effect, agreeing to share the intimacy of a room or the inherent risk in a sporting adventure with strangers are conditions which are opposite to those of the contract. At the level of the employees, it is also the group that gives way to the alliance because it is the feeling of a common belonging that motivates employees to stay in the organisation even if they can have higher wages elsewhere. As for the partners, the flexibility and the arranging nature of the agreements are also motivated by the type of relationship with the community and concern as regards the most vulnerable people.

What the exchange produces

As long as it is clearly defined and duly performed, the *contract* produces satisfaction for every party involved in the exchange. The service provided allows the transfer of knowledge from the instructor to the customer and thereby generates mutual recognition. Everyone gives and receives something, whether in the relationship with customers, with employees or with partners.

But the *alliance* which accompanies the contract produces something other than individual satisfaction and recognition for each party. It produces a Common. There is not only gift and counter-gift but also interdependence. There is not only individual progress but also a collective experience. There is not only the exchange of services but also symbolic reciprocity (such as free coffee for employees). And the Common created in this way does not correspond to a result known in advance: it emerges from meeting with strangers, the sharing of risk, evenings of relaxation. The Common does not come from an activity

undertaken together but from an event lived together. An extra-ordinary experience which allows everyone to re-invest the ordinary, the everyday life. The Common is not that of a group of people who will keep in touch but that of a shared representation of the world, a common way of looking at reality and situating oneself in it.

The *contract* logic and the *alliance* logic thus refer to two different types of exchange in relation to what is exchanged, to the way in which one exchanges, and to what the exchange produces. But the two logics are necessary and interdependent. The alliance needs the framework of the contract to deploy, and the contract needs the opening of the alliance not to suffocate. A contract without an alliance may die of rigidity. An alliance without a contract may die of dilution. It is the tension between contract and alliance which allows an institution to stay alive and in motion.

5. CONCLUSION

The contract logic and the alliance logic which we used to describe the relationships experienced in this organisation with customers, employees and partners, confirm that the relational dimension is an identification feature of the SSE, even for the commercial players operating in the sector. It is neither its ‘curative and restorative’ purpose nor its ‘democratic’ functioning that first characterise the practices of the SSE. It is above all its relational dimension. We can say that the singularity of the SSE is mainly anthropological: the human being appears above all as a relational being. The human is defined by a certain type of relationship with oneself, with others and with the future. And it is this triple relationship that takes a particular shape in the SSE. This particular form is presented here through the logic of the contract and the logic of the alliance, which we have characterised using the case of the organisation we studied. By way of conclusion, we will look at the characteristics of these two logics in generic terms and present them in terms of the three human relationships evoked: relationship with oneself, relationship with others and relationship with the future.

5.1. The relationship with oneself

One can identify in the contract and in the alliance two different forms of relationship with oneself. The contract makes an exchange of wealth possible and ensures that each party gives the other something equivalent. The contract is therefore based on what each party can bring, their skills or assets. On the contrary, the source of the alliance lies in the incompleteness of each one, the need that each one has of the other in order to face its existence. In the first case, humans are seen in terms of their skills, achievements and knowledge. In the second case, humans are seen in terms of their incompleteness, what they lack, and their fundamental need for the other. Both logics lead to an exchange, but the original motivation is radically different.

5.2. The relationship to others

The contract is based on a relationship of mutual mistrust between the parties: the contract makes it possible not to be ‘fooled’ by the other. It is therefore the result of a cost-benefit calculation made by each party, where everyone will try to maximise their earnings. The contract responds to a logic of ‘frameworking’ which allows each partner to insure itself against the risks that the other may provoke. The alliance, on the contrary, is the result of mutual trust and unconditional commitment. It is not based on calculation but on the partners’ reciprocal recognition and on the desire to take risks together. The alliance pertains

to a logic of 'engendering': one does not seek to protect oneself from the other, but to build something with the other. In the contract each party remains independent and benefits from an equivalent exchange with the other party. The alliance, on the other hand, creates a real relationship of interdependence between the parties, where each one is transformed by the other.

5.3. *The relationship with the future*

The contract is based on the prediction of the future: we try to anticipate as far as possible what can happen, the hazards and the probability of occurrence. If something unforeseen happens, the contract can be broken. On the other hand, in the alliance, the future is by definition open: we do not know it and we do not try to lock it up in what is already known. The contract tries to minimise the unexpected, while the alliance provides a means of better preparing for the future.

The practices of the social and solidarity economy are grounded in both a logic of contract and a logic of alliance. These economic practices need the contract to be able to operate on the market and interact with all the other economic players. However, it is the logic of the alliance, associated with the contract logic, which can constitute their distinctive feature: these practices are always based on a gamble rather than a guarantee, on trust rather than mistrust, on recognition rather than calculation. The practices of the social and solidarity economy start from the belief that every human being, indeed every living being, has a life potentiality to deploy, still unknown but which can spring up and develop if the living being is put in a true relation of interdependence with the other living beings. It is the alliance relationship which makes everyone alive and creative. The contract provides the framework which enables the parties to organise so that the alliance can deploy.

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