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## Which kind of Citizen for what kind of Society?

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**PEKEA** A political and ethical knowledge  
on economic activities

Un saber político y ético  
en las actividades económicas

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sur les activités économiques



## **The Role and Responsibility of the actors Thoughts of an activist of Interdependent People**

### **What kind of citizen for what kind of society?**

#### **Thanks**

First of all, allow me to thank you for your invitation to this conference. I do not intervene in the capacity of academic and researcher but as a member of Peoples Solidaires - Interdependent People - , an international solidarity French NGO which gathers 80 local associations as well as individual members. PEKEA Executive Secretary Marc Humbert and I have known each other for a while since he is also a member of Interdependent People and that I am a member of PEKEA too.

I wish that my being here at this conference enhances a little more the bonds between the members of our two organizations in order to contribute to build alternatives to go towards a more interdependent and more fraternal world.

#### **Introduction**

The responsibility of actors, more particularly that of citizens, to build a more fraternal world is a challenge for Interdependent People, a French NGO of international solidarity whose activities deal with NORTH-SOUTH partnerships, with the defence of the economic, social and cultural rights of the populations of the South, and with education to international citizenship.

When one considers that citizenship is not a spontaneous behavior but socially constructed, one can acknowledge the on-going relationship between each individual and other actors or organisations (members of civil society or academics). Let us call these actors manufacturers of citizenship. The individual himself , through his various personal and collective actions, being the first element of this manufacture.

However, voting, participating in the construction of society requires an overall vision of many elements, even more so when reflecting on the process of globalisation or the influence one country has over others in their various political, economic, social and cultural developments.

This brings us back to the question of the necessary knowledge to enjoy citizenship, a knowledge which is often held by social elites. However, have not we witnessed over the course of history the bulk-heading of this knowledge amNGO these various elites? By “elite”, I mean a group of actors with independent means of diffusion, of influence over populations. AmNGO they are intellectuals and activists with important responsibilities in various civil society organisations.



This paper aims at reconsidering several questions upon this knowledge in order to boost co-operation between activists and academics, and allow a better analysis of what prevents or slows down the acquisition and diffusion of this new knowledge in the populations.

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu stated that “sociology [was] a fight sport”. To me, this quote perfectly illustrates the endless fight that many intellectuals must carry out against those who guard the gates of the great house of so-called scientific truths.

In a similar way, the fight against false ideas is also a fight sport in the activist world. In my opinion, it is by confronting one’s own thoughts and convictions to the strategies of one’s organisation that an activist can contribute to citizenship, not by applying the latter blindly.

Thus this presentation undoubtedly represents a certain number of Interdependent People’s conceptions but, most importantly, they are my own activist convictions. It is understood that these convictions need collective analysis (with Interdependent People, with PEKEA...) to improve their level of relevance, precision, and formalisation, even if it means putting some of them into question.

A first interrogation: which are the effects of liberalism on the various actors including those of civil society? One cannot disregard the influence of liberal thought on our strategies of action as actors of civil society. Shouldn't the slogan " think total and act local" also integrate this dimension?

This is why I gathered some remarks in a first part entitled: **a citizenship yet to define** (I) where several new elements in the definition of citizenship are studied, then I continue questioning the current limits of the expressions of citizenship, considering both its contents and its social base.

This first part leads to thinking about **“citizen alternatives for other types of societies”** (II) where two types of alternatives are retained: those of the necessary construction of new knowledge for the manufacturers of citizenship. Then, the alternatives on the promotion of new behaviours.

## **I - Contemporary citizenship yet to define**

It seems important to underline the importance of the evolutions citizenship has undergone recently, especially with all the ideas which emerging from the past Social Forums. But one cannot claim success yet. These new ideas must boost the necessary reflection about the context in which these civil expressions evolve. This reflection would help establish the limits of the extent and contents of citizenship. Indeed, can a citizenship profitable to only a few have a satisfactory content?



## A - Evolutions of the contents of the citizenship in a difficult context

It is certainly easy to agree on these evolutions, and probably on the context in which they take place too. But these specifications are useful to measure or grasp the importance of citizenship's limits.

1 Those evolutions of citizenship's contents which one cannot but enjoy

Citizenship as a right to participate in the public thing kept developing over the last three centuries. Voting rights often granted only to one social category of society, were extended to all men... and, later, to women. Even the contents of citizenship improved with the possibility for employees of unionize, to fight for better working conditions, better wages... then, to found associations and participate in multiple activities.

These first evolutions continued in the 1960's and 70's when several associations grasped the issue of declining economic and social conditions of the populations of the South. They impel actions of international solidarity such as fair trade or more generally various actions aiming at giving the concerned populations their economic dignity. The times when one thought in terms of company/group interests or consumer' interests are gone. Now, one must think globally and act locally on social and environmental issues.

Then came the world, regional, local social forums, the conferences... All these recent exchanges between multiple actors of civil society from all over the planet allowed the emergence of a reflection which in turn made it possible to highlight the fact that the many actions for sustainable development are very useful but might not be enough. It is now necessary to reconsider the dogmas of liberal economy based on growth and to create alternatives, from propositions for other types, other levels of growth to the concept of un-growth. This is the most considerable qualitative change as, before that, the need for growth itself was not put into question neither by liberals nor by Marxists.

Thus, it is impossible to skip the importance of this evolution of citizenship on the level of the possibilities of weighing on the public thing or on all the aspects of the construction of society. This evolution was born with the awakening of a global citizenship. Indeed, several NGO's mottoes state that "the world is a village".

Nor is it possible to overlook the role of certain persons in these last evolutions. Several activists of many NGOs developed citizenship by carrying out reflections and actions to counter-current of generally accepted ideas. This sometimes contributed to the reactivity and the relevance of their organizations.

## 2 A positive evolution... ...in a difficult context

For reasons linked to the liberal ideology: a civil activist must take an increasingly more significant part in society, while a certain number of questionable habits and values have, in



return, a certain influence on his/her action. For example, the belief that growth will solve local problems or NORTH-SOUTH inequalities in the INGO run. Moreover, it is difficult to measure the effects of individualism, of personal ambitions in the exercise of citizenship by activists from organizations of civil society. A great number of media (newspapers, radio, TV) have an extremely important impact as they analyze and relate what occurs in the world through liberal lenses.

For reasons related to the context of NGO's activities also: a difficult context for the actors of the South where the trade-union activists and NGOs undergo daily pressure, from threats of being fired to attacks and eliminations of activists.

In the North, in France for example, difficulties are of a different kind. Over the last decades, employers did everything to weaken any counter-power within societies. To reach that state of affairs, they used various tools, in particular they pressured on trade unions to gather various trade-union functions in a single individual, causing a professionalisation or a "permanentisation" of the trade-union activity, to the disadvantage of trade-union teams of societies.

On the whole, liberal globalization does not allow a great part of the populations with the most difficulties to organize/unionize and, because of its liberal ideological weight on other populations, it limits the possibilities of expression of citizenship.

## **B A citizenship still limited as far as its social base and contents**

If the world is a village, only a small part of the population can participate in the life of this village. Similarly, several factors explain the limits regarding the current contents of the citizenship: approaches often limited to the actors of the North, institutionalisation of solidarity, etc...

### **1 A citizenship only accessible to a minority**

In old democracies, parts of the population were excluded from voting (for example, slaves in the first Greek democracies). In current globalization, similar phenomenon can be observed.

First because political and economic actors of the North have been able to impose their views to the heads of states of the South which cannot exert their sovereignty any more. The economic dependence these States undergo prevents them to fulfill their duties of education, health, assistance to food sovereignty. These conditions restrain a great part of their populations to access to expressions of citizenship.

Then because an increasingly greater part of the populations of the North does not participate either in trade-unions and associative life nor in local or national political life. Are these populations disappointed by the past promises of every sides? Is their lack of economic and social stability the only brake to the access to citizenship? An inventory of the possible causes is necessary.



It seems thus impossible to deny that the exercise of citizenship in its various forms is often only accessible to few people, who, economically and socially speaking, are generally in the average layers. While one can only encourage these populations to continue exerting their citizenships, understanding the reasons why citizenship does not have a wider social base is an issue.

## **2 The concept of citizenship: a concept biased by the approach of the actors of the North**

The actors of civil society of the North are more numerous and have more means of action than those in the South. This problem would more easily find a positive outcome if there were true North-South exchanges so that each applied other forms of development. Actually, most projects are designed according to the North's point of views, which does not let the actors of the South build their own versions of development, according to their realities.

There are still too many actions which are carried out only in direction of the unorganized populations, without cooperating with local civil society organizations which fight for more democracy or for economic dignity.

## **3 Forms of assistance and solidarity limiting the field of citizenship**

Expressions of assistance and sharing of the past disappeared in our so-called modern or evolved societies. Religious institutions started compensating for the deficiencies of these forms of spontaneous assistance. Then, states took over. And international financial institutions started helping the "developing countries".

Isn't all this assistance to the people or countries left aside by globalization more beneficial to its suppliers than to those who receive it? Don't they allow the maintenance or the increase of inequalities? Indeed, what is given with a hand by Northern countries is often taken back several times *via* the other hand, as the issue of the debt perfectly illustrates.

There are also many forms of development aid from NGOs of the North which undoubtedly helped realizing the extent of inequalities between the North and the South. However, these projects are just answers to urgent needs for populations of the South. They cannot be counted as civil actions aiming at fighting against the major causes of the noted problems. It is more a matter of desire of doing good, often with moral and narcissistic connotations, than a matter of challenging the principles of liberal globalization to help populations fight for their rights. These forms of actions contribute to emptying solidarity from a real mobilizing content.

Moreover, in several countries of the North, while various actors (state and/or social actors) deal with questions of national solidarity such as the reform of the retirement system, health insurance issues or compensation for the unemployed...there is no significant movement of fight against inequalities. More generally, the assumption that comes with the institutionalization of solidarity often leads to entrust legislators with all the necessary provisions to cure these inequalities.



In fact, it seems that, by voting for a political or trade-union candidate (or *when* voting, as rates of abstention keep rising), one considers entirely fulfilling one's duty of solidarity. More precisely, citizenship is reduced to the hope that the legislator cures all problems, all inequalities, all injustices.

#### **4 ideologies, acquisition and dissemination of knowledge by the various actors**

What do the actors of civil society do in the acquisition and the dissemination of knowledge? With a few exceptions, activist actions and official organization strategies are taken into account but the (lack of) relevance of their analyses is hardly put into question, at least in certain countries of North. Each organization estimates its actions as mainly positive. Each one blames liberalism, concurrent organizations with questionable strategies...

Such an approach of social matters allows civil society actors to avoid questioning their political approach – “political” defining here the most legitimate strategic choice for one's interests - Thus the approach of an organization can be put into question only by a different approach of the same type. This phenomenon often generates sectarian behaviors which prevent activists from cooperating, hence the many organizations which aim at similar goals but act as if alone. There is a tendency in each organization to present its analysis as *the* Truth and to enroll activists in this kind approach.

To some extent, this state of affairs is responsible for the multiplication of organizations of civil society. It is indeed easier to create one's own association or one's own trade-union than to confront, discuss and argue with another leader who has different opinions. The organization then becomes more a way to exert one's influence than a fraternal arena of debate and mobilization.

The liberal ideology does not have a concurrent ideology any more. Doesn't this leave a very great space with demagogic arguments in the two extremes? First of all, with the reformist currents who want to tackle the harmful consequences of liberal globalization without approaching the causes of them? It encourages people to invest in institutions rather than in the works of civil mobilization. On the contrary, certain actors dream of a "great night" carried by civil society organizations, a kind of avant-garde more lucid than other actors. Those are sometimes unaware of what is done in the institutions and with elected officials but also of the work done with other organizations. Isn't this one of the reasons for the dispersion of society's actors and thus of access to citizenship by more people?

## **II –Alternative citizenships for other types of societies**

Building other types of citizenship to build other types of societies can only be done collectively, with the assistance of all. This construction will progressively grow with the appearance of alternative forms of citizenship. In this approach it is necessary to reconsider our respective



knowledge to build alternatives (A). We, i.e. each actor, even each individual, have our own responsibilities in this construction of a new knowledge. The same is true as far as promoting new civil behaviours (B). These behaviours indeed constitute absolutely necessary approaches for the spreading or the transmission of this new knowledge.

### **A - Alternative ways to build a new knowledge**

Multiple actions by civil society activists will not be enough to go beyond the obstacles to the access or transmission of the knowledge that is necessary to build citizenship contents for more and more numerous populations. Reflecting a/NGO various directions is necessary.

#### **1 a citizenship accessible to the greatest number of population**

A great part of the populations of the South do not have any more possibilities of enjoying many aspects of citizenship because their economic, political and social conditions prevent them to.

The same phenomenon can be observed in the countries of North, to some extent. For example in France, only 9% of the hired workforce is affiliated to trade unions. And members of associations of international solidarity are even less numerous...

How then could we reverse this tendency where the less one person has democratic, economic, social and cultural rights, the less he/she has the possibility to organize and exert certain forms of citizenship? One of the ways to do so is to reinforce the civil society organizations of the South, particularly the intolerably repressed trade unions. Short-term supports and meetings with these organizations are necessary, but real partnerships are too. These partnerships between NGOs from the North and NGOs from the South could even give birth to trade-union cooperations and strengthen civil society in the North.

In addition, it is possible to help organizations of the South fights for the defence of their economic, social and cultural rights by answering their requests for support. 3

In the North, where the number of unemployed and precarious workers keeps increasing, isn't there a desperate need for reflection on the links that exist between the NORTH-SOUTH inequalities and those within one country? In fact, there is much to do, and one could start with supporting workers of the South to prevent the increase of delocalizations and the degradation of working conditions in the North.

There is also need for structuring the representations of alternative societies which would help building some kind of federating base, accessible to most people. This task is what one could call the construction of a new ideology. If this term has been interpreted in many different ways, with positive connotations for some and negative connotations for others, shouldn't sociologists and other civil society members reconsider it today?



## 2 Promoting the South's civil approaches

The access to citizenship in the South is, to some extent, related to the types of relations we weave with their organizations. For example, can't we encourage actors of the South to take initiatives on their modes of development 5? The reinforcement of civil society in the South, contributing to boost South/South partnerships can bring much to the building of new types of citizenship. This should also contribute to enrich our reflection on alternatives to development in our own countries.

Indeed, the acquisition of alternative knowledge is currently very limited, because it does not integrate the South's own conceptions of development. For example, during the WTO talks in Cancun, the South kept asking for the end of agricultural subsidies in the North. Surely, we can understand such claims, but one must note that they remain within the principles of the liberalization of trade.

One way of curing this serious problem is to reinforce the capacities of civil society actors in the South, so that they can undertake a real deliberation, exchange between partners of neighbour countries, to create their own conceptualizations of development on the basis of their own realities, rather than from conceptualizations manufactured in the North 6.

## 3 Reconsidering contemporary expressions of solidarity

There is a need for a reflection to be carried out around the definition of solidarity as a whole, acknowledging the drawbacks of strictly collective societies, and recognizing the good sides of the State's participation in national solidarity. Indeed, contemporary forms of solidarity manage to solve many social problems but, by doing so, they also maintain inequalities at the same level, and fail to enhance the mobilization of citizens.

Instead of expecting miracles out of a new law to solve such or such inequality, couldn't we reconsider other relationship between civil society organizations or citizens and local authorities? Wouldn't this first step help rebuilding new kinds of relationships between citizens and the whole of the elected officials? All these relationships must contribute to make all actors responsible and give true contents to solidarity and...to citizenship.

In addition, shouldn't we reconsider other forms of solidarity? For example, shouldn't we reshape social claims in the North so that they embrace the fight against the NORTH-SOUTH inequalities as well as local inequalities? Instead of viewing solidarity as a group of specific decisions made by such or such organization, initiatives that systematically combine trade-union claims with other local and international actions of solidarity could be promoted.

Moreover, couldn't contemporary solidarity wear a more human face and spontaneously embrace fraternity? This would help turning solidarity beyond doing a good deed to trying and changing the state of things.



The idea according to which solidarity is profitable for both those to whom it is addressed and also for those who exert it is likely to impel a new more fraternal society. This concept of reciprocal solidarity is the one that allows the coexistence between freedom and equality 7. This idea leads to a better consideration of many demonstrations of more fraternal and responsible behaviours.

#### **4 Reconsidering the respective limits of the knowledge of the various manufacturers of citizenship**

The various manufacturers of citizenship have specific, field-limited abilities. This employees' trade union, that small rural producers' trade union, this international solidarity association, that global NGO of academics and researchers... thus often have complementary competences.

Some of these actors can contribute to the construction of a citizenship which takes into account the needs of the populations (employees, small farmers...) that they represent. But, this type of construction is not satisfactory. It must be enriched with the incorporation of other capabilities which consist of seeing the bonds between their own objectives and those of the other organizations.

This deals with the difficult challenge of building a common knowledge, synthesizing but also balancing the various points of view. The second challenge is to build mobilizing types of knowledge. No knowledge can help build a citizenship for a common future if it fails to comprise a mobilizing aspect.

Aren't we here trying to build an ideological tool? What is the relationship between ideologies and science? For Marx, the middle-class ideology constituted a deforming prism allowing the powerful to maintain their capacity. He suggested "proletarian Science" would help reach the Truth. Today, adopting the liberal ideology is a similar process. The only thing that changed is the deforming prism: liberal analyses are now taken as Scientific Truths.

Compared to this rather simplistic dichotomy, a first difficulty is overcome owing to the fact that many scientists refuse today to shelter in the temple of Western thought knowledge as if it were the expression of a Single Truth. On the contrary, they choose multidisciplinary approaches, with several explanatory hypotheses.

Let us take the example of the ideology of fight of classes. This ideology made it possible to beat in breach the liberal ideology in the sense that it gave the objectives and hopes. It had positive and structuring qualities that gathered organizations and citizens around the fight for a better life and better working conditions... On the other hand, this ideology often also misrepresented reality 8, in particular by not questioning the concept of growth or other elements.

More generally this ideology allowed only one expression limited of the citizenship controlled to scientific designs and avant-gardists with having knowledge and consequently capacity. Under these conditions of multiple expressions of the citizenship could not develop. Can't one retain however there a certain number of aspects positive and structuring which it would be possible to



integrate in a reflexion to build a made ideology of balance or proportioning allowing a altermondialism structuring to mobilize largely without being made absorb by that of deforming prism of reality?

## **B Investing in new behaviours**

The evolution of citizenship is related to the acquisition of new knowledge but also to the transmission this knowledge. This transmission is not a simple problem of communication technique. It is especially a matter of quality of democratic debates and exchanges and, ultimately of quality of the actors' behaviours.

### **1 About the relations between the various actors**

As individual, political, intellectual actor or organization of civil society, we need to build other relations, new complementarities to widen the access to citizenship to a greater number of people. It is for example possible to ensure the promotion of NORTH-SOUTH complementarities promoting assets of the organizations of the South and their experiments.

For example, Burkina Faso's civil society underwent serious distortions to democracy in the end of the 1990's. The fights of the MBDHP (Burkinabè Movement for Humans rights and for the People) after the assassination of journalist Norbert ZNGO who denounced corruption and impunity boosted the number of civil society members in this country (women's, students' movements, trade unionists...) This evolution helped solve the dispersion of civil society and a widened democratic space in Burkina Faso in a few years. The promotion of this experience must show the way to go to our own organizations in the North.

Thus, according to the country or region we live all in, we experience different contexts and cultures, various expressions and levels of democracy. It is in this very diversity that we must draw all the richnesses of our movement.

Our common future cannot be built by only one organization. Unlike an enlightened avant-garde, global alternative movements require an interbreeding of cultures but also of social thought. When we need a project for people to gather around, fight against the liberal single thought and to restore hope, this project must be a collective long-term one.

The "great evening" resulting from a great agitation, of a great mobilization carried by some civil society actors is not desirable because what is at stake is the slow evolution of mentalities and behaviours, in a fraternal and not moralizing spirit. Those will shape our organizations differently, they will give make a greater number of people join them. To achieve this goal, access to our associations must be simplified through improved organization. This requires much reflection but other civil behaviours also.



## 2 Boost other civil behaviours

In the North, one can hear about responsible consumption when dealing with the purchase of fair-trade products or when one rides collective transportation or his bicycle instead of one's car... All these behaviors are creditable and must spread but citizenship cannot be reduced to these consumer choices or to other limited individual acts.

Responsible consumption can really develop only thanks to exchanges within but also between organizations. These exchanges already exist. But new individual behaviours are necessary, so that they become more important and play a significant part in the civil construction of a common future.

This is why citizenship will evolve especially by the contribution of individuals in a certain number of collective behaviours:

- by expressing, in one's associative or trade-union organization, one's own opinion in a constructive spirit i.e. by taking time, by showing patience to regulate dissensions. It also takes critical spirit over the comfort of routine or of the "nationalism of organization"
- by fighting against sectarianism. For example, being more self-demanding than critical and pejorative towards contradictors. An interdependent and fraternal behavior is necessary between activists of various organizations. This must enable us to discuss our respective convictions (before the positions of our organizations).

Aren't all these new behaviours many variations of fraternity? They can contribute to restore hope in an always fragile citizenship balancing between passion and reflexion, to build a common future together.

*Rennes, September 27, 2004*

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