



Labour, Education & Society

17

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(eds.)

Social Innovation,
the Social Economy
and World Economic
Development

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Table of Contents

Foreword.....	1
<i>György Széll</i>	
Introduction.....	5
1 Social Innovation, Economic Development, Employment and Democracy.....	7
<i>Denis Harrisson, Reynald Bourque & György Széll</i>	
I Social Economy, Accountable Investment and Development	17
2 A New Economic Paradigm for the Challenges of Sustainable Development.....	19
<i>Léopold Beaulieu</i>	
3 The Social Economy: a 'New' Tool at the Service of the Battle for Employment	29
<i>Maria Teresa de Sousa</i>	
4 The Social Economy and Labour – A Strong Identity and a Few Paradoxes.....	51
<i>Denis Harrisson & Mariline Comeau-Vallée</i>	
5 From Working on Values to Transforming Social Activities: How to Update the Principle of 'by and for all'?.....	71
<i>Dominique Efros</i>	
6 Microfinance, Poverty and the Social Economy of Empowerment.....	83
<i>Anup Dash</i>	
7 Renewable Energy Cooperatives and the Development of Rural Regions in the Third World.....	105
<i>Sven Schaller</i>	

II	Protection of Work Basic Rights and Corporate Social Responsibility	121
8	Transnational Trade Unionism and Social Regulation of Globalization <i>Reynald Bourque</i>	123
9	Strategic Unionism: A Key to the Quality of Social Dialogue Outcomes <i>Thobile Yanta</i>	139
10	Global Economy and Workers Rights: Ethical Challenges to Corporate Social Responsibilities <i>Yunus Dauda</i>	155
11	Critical Reflections on Work, Citizenship and Corporate Social Responsibility <i>Catherine Casey</i>	167
12	Negotiation and Transaction in the Context of Restructuring: Ethics, Trust and Social Responsibility <i>Jocelyne Robert</i>	187
13	The Role of Social Actors in the Context of Restructuring Processes in the European Household Appliances Industry <i>Volker Telljohann</i>	219
III	Economic and Employment Transformations in Developed Economies	243
14	Shaping Innovation by Social Research – the New Role of the Social Sciences <i>Jürgen Howaldt, Ralf Kopp & Michael Schwarz</i>	245
15	The Gap of Services and the Three-Sector-Hypothesis (Petty's Law): Is this Concept out of Fashion or a Tool to Enhance Welfare? <i>Detlev Ehrig & Uwe Staroske</i>	261
16	The Establishment of Market Structures – Societal Transition and Social Challenge <i>Friedrich Fuerstenberg</i>	279
17	Organization of Work for Qualified Self-employed Workers: Internalization of Control and Externalization of Risk <i>Martine D'Amours</i>	293

IV	Employment and Social Regulation in Transitional Economies	307
18	China's Outward FDI and Employment <i>Qi Zou</i>	309
19	Does the System for Eliminating the Last Class Employees Violate Labour Laws in China? <i>Dinghong Yi</i>	323
20	India as a Transitional Society – Challenges, Risks, Strengths and Prospects <i>Chintamani Lakshman</i>	331
21	Informal Sector Workforce in the Era of Marketization: Social Protection Interventions in Indian context <i>Debi S. Saini</i>	343
V	Employment Public Policies: Intercultural and Intergenerational Challenges	367
22	Current Sociology of Strangerhood and Implications for Immigration Policies <i>Yaşar Aydın</i>	369
23	Migration Policies in the Service of Economic Needs: The French Illustration <i>Jean-Michel Plassard & Isabelle Desbarats</i>	379
24	Maturity or Discipline? Social Perspectives on Upbringing and Education <i>Heinz Sünker</i>	395
25	General Technical Training: Case Study of the ProJovem Young People's Training Programme in Brazil <i>Fabio Luiz Zamberlan, Paulo Cesar Greenhalgh de Cerqueira Lima & Maria Silvia Passos</i>	407
26	The Intergenerational Challenges Presented by the Necessary Reform of the Employment and Social Welfare Structure <i>Olivier Guiraudie</i>	435
	Conclusion	453
27	Social Innovations and Labour <i>György Széll</i>	455
	The Authors	467

12 Negotiation and Transaction in the Context of Restructuring: Ethics, Trust and Social Responsibility¹

Jocelyne Robert

"A society where everything can be negotiated is characterized by the fact that everybody can take the initiative of cooperation. Very often, in contemporary societies, any of the conditions of its success do not really exist. (Ballet & De Bry, 2001, pp. 164-165)

[...] with increased complexity, the need of reassurance towards the present increases, the need of trust for example." (Luhmann, 2006, p. 14)

Introduction

In the current context of globalization and restructuring, it seemed us to be interesting to present and analyse a situation of negotiation related to a re-opening of the production site within an enterprise of international level. This informal negotiation directly involves union representatives, and the management of the group. From the result of the negotiation depends the revival of production activity and retention of 10,000 direct and indirect jobs. This sociological analysis of the 'ideal-typical' case-study in the Weberian sense permits to consider a set of specific features today: negotiation on the international level over the maintaining of local economic activities, time pressure, and uncertainty situations. It allows us to illustrate the 'structuration' theory of Giddens insofar as we cannot ignore neither the importance of structures nor the actions of individuals; each element has an influence on the other and is influenced back.

The situation we will focus on in this chapter is the one of the reorganisation in the European steel industry. In 2002, we began a study on a Belgian enterprise issued from a long succession of local joint-ventures and mergers with a French company. Several years later, this entity joins some other companies and forms a European group. In 2006, this group was acquired by an international family-owned enterprise.

We will essentially present here the stages of a surprising negotiation with many unexpected developments gathered from a union representative we met.

¹ All translations are by the author, if not indicated otherwise. Thanks to Aigul Asfarova for the translation of the French text into English.