

# BUILDING UP SOCIAL SOLIDARITY ECONOMY

**BUSSE**  
building up social & solidarity economy

## Building Up Social Solidarity Economy

This booklet was published in 2020 as part of the Building Up Social Solidarity Economy international project that was funded by the European Union under the Erasmus+ programme and conducted in partnership by:

Ekumenická akademie, [www.ekumakad.cz](http://www.ekumakad.cz)

Stowarzyszenie Kooperatywa Spożywcza "Dobrze", [www.dobrze.waw.pl](http://www.dobrze.waw.pl)

Utopia, [www.utopia.sk](http://www.utopia.sk)

Katholische Sozialakademie Österreichs, [www.ksoe.at](http://www.ksoe.at)

RIPESS Europe, [www.ripess.eu](http://www.ripess.eu)

**AUTHORS:** Nina Józefina Bąk, Markus Blümel, Wojtek Mejor, Jason Nardi, Maroš Prčina, Eva Riečanská, Karolína Silná, Dražen Šimleša, Peter Vittek

The authors would like to thank **Elena Tzamouranou, Luca Asperius, Vera Gjokaj, Isa Álvarez and Judith Hitchman** for reviewing the texts and giving helpful feedbacks on the content.

LANGUAGE CORRECTION: **Judith Hitchman**

GRAHPIC DESIGN: **Wojtek Mejor**

PUBLISHER: **RIPESS Europe**, rue du Moulin 1, 3801 Schifflange, Luxembourg

Published in 2020.

ISBN 978\_2\_9199651\_9\_9



All photos and images in this publication are the property of the above-mentioned partners unless otherwise stated. This publication has been published under the Creative commons licence: creative commons 3.0 non commercial attribution share-alike



**Erasmus+**

The project is implemented with the support of the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union. The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

# CONTENTS

Building Up Social Solidarity Economy – Introduction . . . . .	2
Social Solidarity Economy in Central and Eastern Europe . . . . .	4
Starting up . . . . .	10
Learning from good practices . . . . .	11
Self Organizing: Democratic Governance & joint decision-making . . . . .	12
Property and Financing . . . . .	14
Building Up your SSE – how to get started . . . . .	17
Proclaiming Your Dream: Developing Vision and Mission Statements . . . . .	17
Community Building . . . . .	20
Working With People . . . . .	21
Knowing Your Community . . . . .	25
Reaching out . . . . .	27
Co-operatives . . . . .	30
What Is A Co-Operative? . . . . .	31
Cooperativism As Part Of Sse . . . . .	35
How To Start a Co-Op . . . . .	37
Good Practices . . . . .	39
Food Sovereignty . . . . .	42
Food Sovereignty and SSE . . . . .	43
Food related challenges and solutions. . . . .	43
Isn't it just a utopia? . . . . .	47
Case studies . . . . .	48
The global movement . . . . .	49
Easiest ways to be part of Food Sovereignty movement. . . . .	52
On the Path toward Transformation . . . . .	54



# BUILDING UP SOCIAL SOLIDARITY ECONOMY – INTRODUCTION

*This manual has been designed to accompany the Building Up Social Solidarity Economy educational training.*

Social Solidarity Economy (SSE) can make a major contribution to the solutions of the triple social, environmental and economic crisis. It is also important as a means of fight the growing authoritarianism facing us in a growing number of countries at present. SSE provides us with a toolkit that can help us to transform economic institutions that are currently focused on maximizing profit. It can introduce democratic and co-operative methods that are centered on and respect real human needs and those of our communities and our environment.

SSE offers a variety of tools to support the much-needed socio-ecological transformation!

Social Solidarity Economy aims to involve all economic actors in society; it is based on co-operative and solidarity principles that connect individual needs with those of the community. SSE aims to produce, exchange and consume goods and services that meet the economic and social needs of local and international communities based on an eco-systemic approach. It promotes economic participatory democracy, social justice, environmental awareness, gender equity and a pluralistic, resilient and multicultural society.

**Building Up Social Solidarity Economy (BUSSE)** is an Erasmus+ project that focuses on disseminating SSE know-how and practices in Central and Eastern Europe. The participating organisations in the BUSSE project are Ekumenická akademie (Ecumenical Academy, Czech Republic), Dobrze Food Co-operative from Poland, Utopia from Slovakia, Katholische Sozialakademie Österreichs (ksoe, Catholic Social Academy of Austria) and RIPPES Europe as a pan-European network.

The overall impact that we hope to achieve through this project is to enhance peoples' skills and knowledge of SSE and its transformative potential. We have developed an informal educational programme whose target audience is both people and organisations that are interested in learning about SSE and focusing on the key elements at regional level.

This concise and easy-to-read booklet is based on the training. It highlights some of the key aspects of the training and resources on SSE, and makes it accessible to a wider audience. The four main chapters cover the following topics:

## 1. Starting up

## 2. Community building

## 3. Co-operatives

## 4. Food Sovereignty



The first two chapters of the booklet are more general ones where you can learn about the basics of SSE. The first chapter – Starting up – will provide you with some key information needed for everyone who would like to organize SSE initiatives of various kinds based on democratic and sustainable principles. The essential aspect of a strong SSE enterprise is community. It is based on a collective of persons involved in the SSE enterprise and from a broader perspective, this includes the community of all those impacted by the activities of the collective. This is why the second chapter addresses the issue of community building.

These are the basics: don't start out on your transformative path without this preparation and essential life-saving package!

The remaining two chapters look at areas that are not always clearly and explicitly connected to SSE, but serve as very useful and important examples. In chapter three you can explore SSE principles as applied to co-operatives. Co-operatives have a long tradition, and they form an important part of the SSE "universe". This is why we believe it is worthwhile including co-operatives here. The final topic presented in this booklet is Food Sovereignty, an intensively urgent goal. As Olivier De Schutter, former U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food and agroecologist said: "We won't solve hunger or stop climate change with industrial farming on large plantations. The solution lies in supporting small-scale farmers' knowledge and experimentation, and in raising the incomes of smallholders so as to contribute to rural development."

It is important to emphasize how all four chapters or themes are interconnected and mutually support one another. You cannot have a resilient co-operative if it is not based on community building, and you cannot have an equitable and just Food Sovereignty project if it is not connected to and anchored in SSE values.

We hope you enjoy reading, learning about and using the information, skills and tips for your community endeavours and transformative projects!

# SOCIAL SOLIDARITY ECONOMY IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

## EUROPE'S CO-OPERATIVE AND SOLIDARITY ROOTS

Europe is a vastly diverse continent with different cultures, languages, and economies. If there is something that unites it, it is its social and civic movements, the roots of which reach far into the origins of the workers co-operative movement of the 19th century, the mutualistic practices, the public and private community banks and credit unions, the consumer groups and networks, the workers' unions and the many cultural and care-oriented associations at the core of the welfare state development. The 20th century, through numerous struggles and cultural shifts, has brought European citizens a relative well-being and affirmations of rights, both individual and collective, though often excluding minorities, impoverished or discriminated parts of the population. Far from being fulfilled (in different ways in each country or territory), the concrete vision of a socially just, democratic and inclusive society where the realisation of universal human rights is ensured for all the people, is continuously challenged today. The 21st century has begun with a new wave of reactionary ideologies. This has led to the introduction of austerity measures, more deregulation and privatisation and other neoliberal policies, all of which are undermining its core: economic democracy and self-determination. The recent "globalised" pandemic COVID19 crisis has added to the existing crises, highlighting the root causes of disparities in our societies. It also emphasizes the fragility of an outdated economic system that is based on the concepts of growth, profit, competition and extractivism, as well as the inability of public institutions and policies to provide communities with concrete, collective solutions.

At the same time, the growing legislative recognition of Social Solidarity Economy by many European countries is an increasing reality. Existing and prospective legislation in EU member countries reveals many differences and few similarities. This reflects the need of an over-arching European legislative framework, which is not simple, given the contradictions in the existing EU policies. Some countries have an existing or projected national legislative framework (France, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Greece and Romania), others have a Minister for Social and Solidarity Economy (Luxembourg, Spain and France). Some other countries have a series of regional norms (this is the case in Italy, where 10 regions have made different laws for the promotion of solidarity and sustainable economy).



## **SOCIAL SOLIDARITY ECONOMY: A VECTOR FOR SOCIAL CHANGE**

*...“solidarity” is much more than a concept. First, it is a framework for designing and implementing strategies that strengthen the resilience of communities, regions, and societies. Second, it elevates the idea of advancing the common good collaboratively rather than going it alone. Third, solidarity is a vital motivational resource, and a renewable one. It is a resource that we need from each other in order to sustain the efforts transition will require.*

SSE should be considered as a movement composed of a plurality of actors, (private, social, public – formal and informal), building active bonds between civil society, policy-makers, production and services’ sectors to address peoples’ needs, aspirations and expectations. Karl Polanyi expressed this well in the “The Great Transformation, the political and economic origins of our times”: we need to retrieve a broader definition of the economy, we cannot equate it with the Market. A new form of economy cannot arise from within the dominant financial and economic system unless it deeply changes how people imagine ways to address their needs and desires and feel part of a broader community. That is why SSE is not to be merely identified as the Third Sector (Non Profit or Social Sector), but as a vector of practices and values that allow us to see our world differently.

It is also important to clarify some terms: it is very common for the social economy to be conflated with the solidarity economy. They are not the same thing and the implications of equating them are rather profound. The social economy is commonly understood as part of a “third sector” of the economy, complementing the “first sector” (private/profit-oriented) and the “second sector” (public/planned). While exact definitions of the social economy vary, a common definition is that it includes co-operatives, mutual societies, associations, and foundations

(CMAFs), all of which are collectively organized, and oriented around social aims that are prioritized above profits, or return to shareholders. The primary concern of the social economy is not to maximize profits, but to achieve social goals (which does not exclude making a profit, necessary for reinvestment, for instance). Some people consider the social economy to be the third leg of capitalism, along with the public and the private sector. Others view the social economy as a stepping stone towards a more fundamental transformation of the economic system and organisation of our communities.

The solidarity economy (c.f. diagramme below) seeks to change the whole social/economic system and puts forth a different paradigm of development that upholds human rights, social justice, solidarity and ecological practices. It pursues the transformation of the economic system from a market-based capitalist model that gives primacy to maximising private profit and blind growth to that of a radically different and sustainable economic model that places people and the planet at its core. As an alternative economic system, the solidarity economy thus includes all three sectors private, public and the social sector.

Since it is not a sector of the economy, but a vector of change and transformation of the economic system, it cannot be easily measured through official indicators or statistics and is therefore remain for the most part "invisible". According to the last

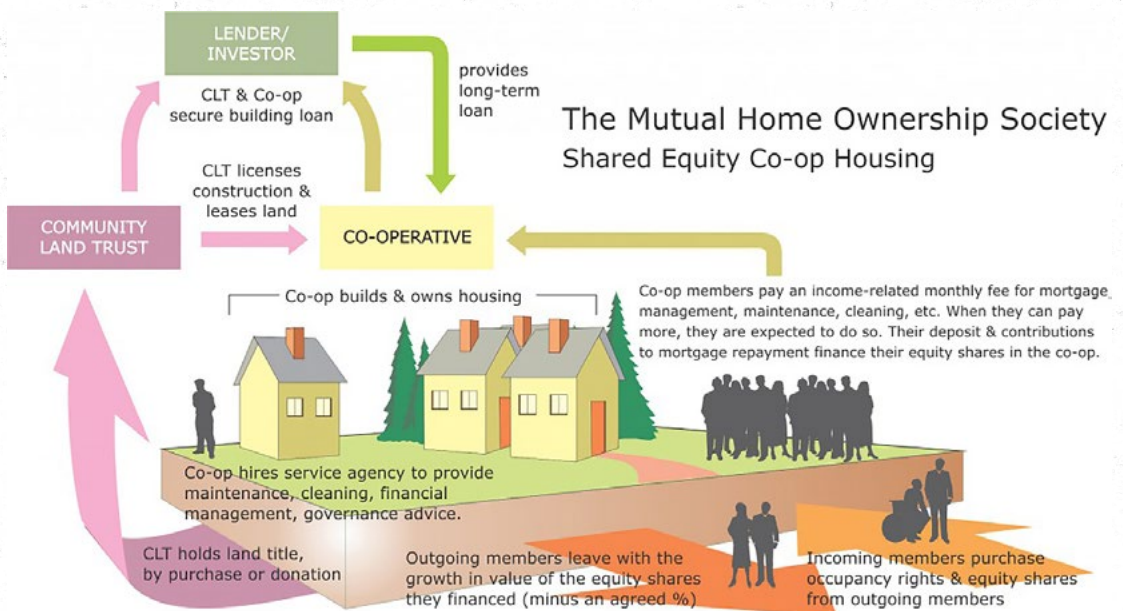


Figure 1: Diagram – Source: M. Lewis (2012), "The Resilience Imperative: Co-operative Transitions to a Steady-state Economy"



available EU statistics, workers in Third Sector increased in the first 15 years of this century from 11 million to 16 million, or an average of 6.5 % of the working population of the EU (with some countries reaching almost 15%). This number does not include all the informal approaches and the mixed forms of SSE practices and initiatives (from alternative production and co-construction to barter, social currencies, time banks, etc.) or the role of many local public administrations that support and promote them. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) groups, Solidarity Consumer and Producer Groups are a practice that is multiplying in many forms: from a few hundred at the end of the 1990s and only in two-three countries, to tens of thousands in 2020. In 2015, there were over 1 million people in Europe involved in CSA.

## **CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE AND SSE**

An example of this is the development of the co-operative movement and social economy in Central Europe, which has a "long, rich and turbulent history. Especially all four Visegrad countries share similarities and common experiences and have recently walked similar paths of economic transformation". As this project focuses mainly in this region of Europe – in connection with the experience of a wide pan-European and worldwide SSE movement – it is fundamental to examine its development in this specific context, where the culture of co-operation, equality and solidarity have been deeply challenged by history. "The memories about the co-operative system forced on people by the communist regime have resulted in the negative connotation that the word 'co-operative' bears nowadays. The negative undertone is connected to the whole co-operativism as a phenomenon despite the fact that around the World, and especially in Southern and Western Europe, co-operativism is a progressive, modern economic and social model that has gone through an organic and deep development process". The advent of capitalist market economy in these countries has also marked a negative reaction against collective forms of management and ownership of enterprises, leading to their privatisation or "inclusion" in the market economy or confining them to social and professional reintegration.

Moreover, in Central and Eastern Europe, "70 per cent of third sector employment takes the form of direct volunteering. By contrast, employment in NPIs (Non-Profit Institutions) – both paid and volunteer – accounts for a much smaller 23.7 per cent.

This contrasts sharply with Northern Europe, where 73 per cent of the TS (Third sector) employment is in NPIs, much of it in paid positions, while employment in coops accounts for under 6 per cent and direct volunteering a relatively small 21.5 per cent". New generations in the formerly Soviet-dominated territories are gradually changing this, shifting also the perception of both public support (both legal and financial, at State and European Union levels) and public opinion, looking with interest at examples from Southern Europe, where there is "an exceptionally high 14.5 per cent of TS employment in co-operatives, a similarly quite high 33 per cent in direct volunteering".

## **A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT**

"The economy is a political construct, and is everyone's business. Rather than the 'invisible hand of the market', we prefer to concentrate on the democratic construction of a new social contract that takes the Commons into account, is based on Solidarity as the starting point and not as a process of redistribution, and aims at both individual and collective well-being. We want to move from an extractive and destructive economy to a resilient and regenerative economy, where nature and its limits are actually taken into account."

And as Jean-Luis Laville (one of the key authors on SSE in the last 30 years) puts it, "the future is all about solidarity, but it can take two forms. The first is self-organized solidarity by the people concerned; it is based on mutual help, mutual aid, proximity and reciprocity. The latter is organised by the public authorities and is also necessary so that forms of equalisation and large-scale redistribution can ensure that equality between social groups and between territories is respected. The challenge for tomorrow is to combine the two forms of democratic solidarity, the one based on self-organisation and the one structured by public authorities. What we need is a new public action that emanates from the co-construction between associative initiatives and public authorities. This cooperation will not be obvious, it will even be conflictual in some respects, but it can put solidarity back at the centre of our social contract and thus make democracy more alive."

This is why we need a deep cultural change, starting with the promotion of the culture of co-operation and collaboration from an early age (peer and co-operative learning in schools) to youth and professional education in the workplace and in our every-



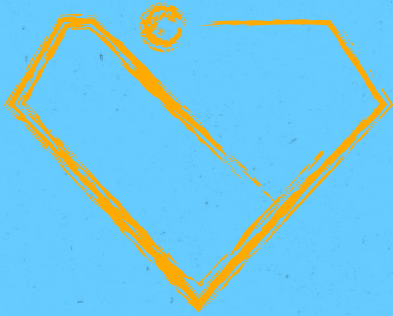
day lives. However as we are well aware, neither solidarity nor co-operation can or should be imposed, nor can they be state-led.

Democratising the economy lies at the core of this transition: empowering ourselves by doing, not waiting for something to happen. Do it yourself, but not by yourself or for yourself. Working with others and deciding together through active participation. By doing this, we also create a deep change in the political culture, one that requires us to rethink the role of the State and public authorities, and the relationship with citizens, as “enablers” and “partners”.

Finally, the convivial dimension is a fundamental part of building the sense community, as Ivan Illych pointed out: “To formulate a theory about a future society both very modern and not dominated by industry, it will be necessary to recognize natural scales and limits. We must come to admit that only within limits can machines take the place of slaves; beyond these limits they lead to a new kind of serfdom. (...) Once these limits are recognized, it becomes possible to articulate the triadic relationship between persons, tools, and a new collectivity. Such a society, in which modern technologies serve politically interrelated individuals rather than managers, I will call ‘convivial’.” This is in clear opposition to the imposed culture of “austerity” and market growth that has been imposed on European people in many countries over the last decade, especially in Central East-ern Europe, and that they have been led to consider as inevitable. This value and practice of conviviality lies at the core of the SSE.

In other words, an SSE culture fully recognizes the existing limits and turns them into a shared Commons: it takes effort to achieve it, but it can be fun.





## STARTING UP

Social Solidarity Economy represents an alternative vision of economy and a response to the unrestrained globalisation and the mainstream economy that focuses exclusively on profit and economic growth. Development of different SSE initiatives both in Europe and worldwide, especially after the economic and financial crises in 2008 clearly demonstrate that more and more alternatives are possible and that they really work. Sustainable living, working and determining solutions collectively has become a way to live better for many people who refuse the concepts of individual entrepreneurship and competition.

So if you are interested in founding an SSE initiative or you are part of an organisation or collective that you would like to transform and help it to become a more solidary and democratic one, this booklet and especially this first chapter will be a useful source of ideas, inspiration or resources to support you in your efforts. The following pages give you a glimpse of the topic and help you find out a few things that might be important to deal with at the beginning, and also what to consider when running an SSE.

## LEARNING FROM GOOD PRACTICES

Since SSE is about “real utopia” and about already existing economic alternatives, let’s start our journey through the “world of Social Solidarity Economy” by having a look at an inspiring “good practice” from the Czech Republic.

### **FAIR & BIO COFFEE ROASTERS**

If you were to walk near the center of Prague, in Sokolovská Street, you can find a small Fair & Bio shop. It is run by the Czech NGO Ecumenical Academy (EA) and among many other Fair Trade products you can buy different sorts of fresh roasted coffee that was roasted just some 25 km away, by the co-operative social enterprise called Fair & Bio Coffee Roasters. The Fair & Bio Coffee Roasters promote social, environmental and economic sustainability, supporting the local economy, communities and decent work – globally and locally.

The history of co-operatives in what is now the Czech Republic and Slovakia (previously Czechoslovakia) goes back more than 170 years. Fair & Bio Coffee Roasters were the first co-operative coffee roasting plant in the Czech Republic. Every coffee bean that is used by the roasters was planted on Fair Trade certified farms. After roasting, the coffee is packaged and labelled manually. 75% of the processes are carried out by mentally and physically disabled employees. The environmental aspect is important as well, and the vast majority of the coffees are grown organically.

The Fair & Bio Roasters started as a follow up on the Fair Trade activities of Ecumenical Academy, one of the pioneers in promoting Fair Trade in the Czech Republic. EA focused on awareness-raising around development issues and economic alternatives, and they didn’t want just to talk, but to show some alternatives in practice. EA therefore founded the first Fair Trade wholesale business in



Fair & Bio Roasters. Photo: Jakub Hrab





*There, monetary income that is earned at the end of the chain is shared by all members who contributed to the production process according to their needs and living conditions.*

*Andreas Exner / Christian Lauk on the Brazilian textile cooperative JUSTA TRAMA*



**Dig deeper on your own.**

In case you do group work on SSE we suggest that you gather case studies and study them. Below you find a questionnaire that helps you find relevant information when you do research on the case, and ask questions to an organisation. It might also be interesting to have a look at at least one case that failed.

We also recommend doing some field research and visiting “good practices” in terms of at least one excursion (we suggest 3 hours).

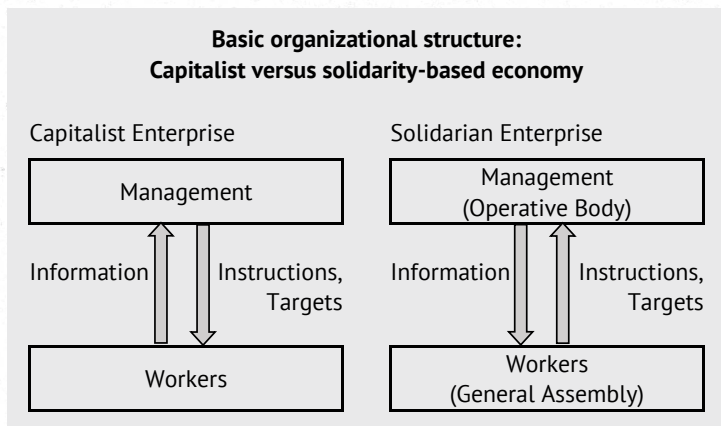
Central and Eastern Europe. After some years and challenges the wholesale business was transformed into the co-operative, with EA and several individuals as founding members.

The project started in 2011 with the help of two EU grants for social enterprises. For some years several interest-free loans from the members of the co-operative helped to stabilize the financial situation. Since 2018 the Fair & Bio Roasters operates without any grants and generates financial profit. In June 2019 the first 5 years of coffee roasting were celebrated with the members and the whole community.

It was a clear choice to become a co-operative from the very beginning. The reason was to become a good example for promoting this type of democratic organisation, that had a long history in the Czech Republic, but what had been disrupted and misused during the period prior to 1989. Inspired by the history and also by Fair Trade farmers, workers and employees from the Global South help to spread the word – not just EA, as well as the co-operative actively promote SSE and share their story.

## SELF ORGANIZING: DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE & JOINT DECISION-MAKING

As Paul Singer, the former Brazilian Secretary of State for Solidarity Economy put it: “The Essence of Solidarity Economy is democracy”. In capitalist firms it is the amount of capital held by individual shareholders that determines who makes the de-



M. Auinger 2009 and B. Leubolt 2007 following P. Singer 2002, 16ff.



### Good practice: Questions to prepare case studies on SSE

- How did you get started? What was helpful or not?
- Please describe the (democratic) governance and organisational structure. (Who is entitled to make which decisions?)
- What is the legal structure?
- What “user value” / value for members / for society is generated?
- What does solidarity (economy) mean to your SSE?
- How did you build a community?
- What was important in reaching your goals / to achieve success?
- Were there /are there any challenges? How did you / do you cope with them?

Further questions might deal with ownership, financing, co-operation (internal/external), communication /conflicts ...

decisions. In SSE co-operatives – depending on the type of SSE project – the workers, the consumers, the users of services etc. have their say on the basis of “one person – one vote”. This does not necessarily mean that a general assembly always takes the main decisions once a year and delegates the decision-making to a Board of Directors. This is just one possibility. Nor does it mean that every single decision is always taken together by unanimous consensus. In practice there are a variety of different ways of exercising democratic governance and joint decision-making. The important thing is that democracy and participation do not simply exist of their own accord. They have to be lived, learned and experienced collectively again and again.

” *The essence of  
Solidarity Economy is  
democracy.*

*Paul Singer*

### **DEMOCRATIC MEETINGS – THE CORE OF SOCIAL SOLIDARITY ECONOMY**

Democratic meetings lie at the center of Social Solidarity Economy. This is where democratic decisions are made. The circle symbolizes the idea that each person has the same say and the same vote since people in SSE treat each other equally. The sociocratic approach reminds us that it is of great importance that everyone is effectively heard, that everybody can utter what she/he thinks. Therefore it is very important that each and every person in the circle has the right to ask questions, express their opinion on an issue and utter his/her concerns, ideas,... If only those raise their hands and say something who are used to speaking out in front of others or who have more experience in



Think about what makes a meeting democratic and effective. What are your experiences and ideas?

To learn more about others' experiences you can search for "guidelines" and other information on democratic and effective meetings on the Internet, such as <https://uhab.org/resource/running-effective-democratic-meetings>

expressing their opinions there might be a lack of democracy and participation.

Democratic meetings are crucial and it is therefore necessary for the group of individuals to develop skills. There is not a head or a leader, instead there is the role of a facilitator / moderator. The way a facilitator prepares the agenda and moderates the meeting is of great importance. It is a role that should not be left to (always the same) experienced persons but it seems good that everyone learns how to do this. By this means, "power" is being de-centralized and evenly shared among "equals". To learn more about democratic meetings and decision-making please also see chapter 2 in this brochure on "community building".

## PROPERTY AND FINANCING

In different places, regions, countries and situations the conditions, legal framework or laws, sources and resources can be different and vary in time. Also the forms of the initiatives and situation of the initiators, the group or collective and their (financial) possibilities can be very diverse, as the practical examples illustrate. In some countries, ethical banks can support your efforts, in some cases the co-operative members have savings to support the enterprise in the start-up phase, some governments or municipalities provide support for social enterprises with interest-free loans or even grants.

When we run an (SSE) enterprise the question comes up: Who owns the bakery? We are very much used to thinking in capitalist terms, which means thinking in terms of private property, sometimes in terms of communal or also State property. If the crucial conditions of ownership are the right to use and the right to control access, SSE initiatives and enterprises have to think about alternatives to property regimes that exclude persons mainly because of their lack of capital or "buying power". Since SSE does not offer investment opportunities in terms of maximizing profits, and since many like-minded persons often do not have sufficient financial resources, it is necessary to discover alternative ways of funding. Many of them already exist. So let's have a look at the following "good practice" which illustrates a remarkable way of doing things differently.

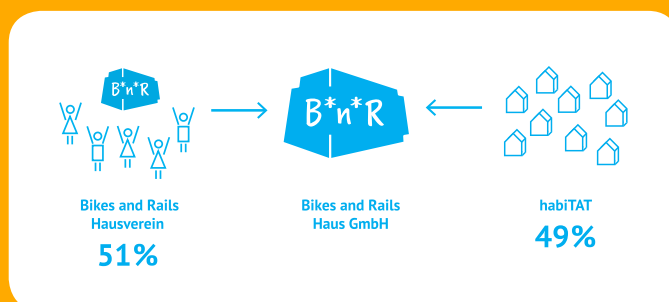
## HABITAT (AUSTRIA)

HabiTAT is an umbrella organization of self-organized “house projects” aimed at “buying out” real estate from the real estate market. The blueprint for HabiTAT was the Mietshäusersyndikat in Germany that now includes more than 150 house projects. The idea is that real estate should not be a speculative good, but rather should aim to serve the needs of the persons living in their homes. Housing should not be treated as ‘for profit’ venture for individuals or companies. HabiTAT and Mietshäusersyndikat provide structures that guarantee that the houses cannot be sold on the open market place – under any circumstances whatsoever (unless if ALL inhabitants of all the other the houses agree to do so). These self-organized “house projects” are based on the solidarity principle: People within a “house project” support one another – plus older “house projects” support new projects. Each group of individuals finds its own way of taking democratic decisions together.

None of the persons living in any of the house projects owns private property. Instead everyone’s need for housing is respected. That’s also the reason why living in a house project does not depend on any financial contributions when you move in. But how does alternative funding work? Some of the users of the real estate may have their private funds that they can contribute. These funds plus so-called “direct credits” from other persons

### Good practice: Bikes and rails

The persons living in the “bikes and rails” building are members of the association “Bikes and Rails Hausverein”. The owner of the real estate is a “plc” (private limited company) which belongs to the “Bikes and Rails Hausverein” (51%) and habiTAT (49%). Illustration: Christina Leyerer





from outside the project are the “basis” for financing the property. Then there is usually funding by an (alternative) bank. The “direct credits” have to be paid back. Sometimes new “direct creditors” are needed if and when people want their money back. However it is not possible to withdraw a major amount of these direct credits at the same time because the “house project” may not be endangered. There are monthly installments to pay back bank loans and direct credits and for maintenance (each user has to pay for this).

Value propositions	Practicalities	Uniqueness	Your Delivery
<p><b>Democracy &amp; participation</b>            What will be your democratic structure?            What will your decision making processes look like?            How do you sustain participation?</p> <p><b>Socio-ecological transformation</b>            What’s the problem that is to be solved?            How do your activities contribute to a socio-ecological change of society and economy?            Who will benefit? How?</p> <p><b>Solidarity</b>            What is solidarity in regard to your internal relations?            In regard to external relations? (SSE, other stakeholders, global south etc.)</p> <p><b>User value</b>            Who’s using it?            What problem is it solving for the users?            Why would users choose your SSE?</p>	<p><b>Main activities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are your main activities in order to realize your value?</li> </ul> <p><b>Main resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you need for it to work?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is different in what you are and how you are doing things?</li> <li>• What could defeat you? (internal threats, market or external risks)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will you reach your users / clients?</li> <li>• Who are your key partners?</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Financial value and revenues</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who contributes financially?</li> <li>• Why do they contribute?</li> <li>• In which way do they pay?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Cost structure</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are your key costs? (fixed, variable)</li> </ul>	

## **BUILDING UP YOUR SSE – HOW TO GET STARTED**

If you want to get started with your SSE you can find various guidelines that may inspire you. For example how to develop your vision, or which steps to take to build an SSE. Watch out for them. Be inspired by the previous experiences of others have. You will find a few hints here.

There are also concepts out there that are used for regular businesses. Why not just adapt them for SSE? For example take the “business canvas”-model or “super hero canvas” (Kieron, 2016). Of course in SSE we do not need any heroes or leaders, but the basic idea of the concept can be transferred to SSE. The “canvas method” helps you to ask major questions. It works like this: You find a number of important questions related to your SSE. Put them down on (only) one piece of paper. Take the time to consider these questions, to discuss them and – most important of all – to answer them. Do this together with others – with your future co-operative members, peers etc.

## **PROCLAIMING YOUR DREAM: DEVELOPING VISION AND MISSION STATEMENTS**

Formulating vision and mission statements can help you pinpoint what your SSE initiative or enterprise is all about and what you want to achieve. Here is the example of MONDRAGON Corporation, the world’s largest network of autonomous co-operatives.

### **Mission statement – MONDRAGON Corporation (Spain)**

*MONDRAGON is a business-based socio-economic initiative integrated by autonomous and independent co-operatives with deep cultural roots in the Basque Country, created for and by people and inspired by the Basic Principles of our Co-operative Experience. It is firmly committed to the environment, competitive improvement and customer satisfaction in order to generate wealth in society through business development and the creation of, preferably co-operative, employment, which is based on a firm commitment to solidarity and uses democratic methods for organisation and management. It encourages participation and the involvement of people in the management, profits and ownership of their companies, developing a shared project which brings together social,*



## tip

A Vision Statement is a one-sentence statement describing the clear and inspirational long-term desired change resulting from an organization or programme's work.

The best visions are inspirational, clear, memorable, and concise.

*business and personal progress. It fosters training and innovation by developing human and technological skills. It applies its own management model aimed at helping companies become market leaders and fostering co-operation.*

### Vision

*We would like to become committed people, with a co-operative identity who form a profitable, competitive and enterprising business group in a global context; who apply a successful socio-business model, offering the market integrated solutions based on experience, knowledge, innovation, inter-cooperation, strategic partnerships, attracting, promoting and generating talent; and which generates sufficient resources to provide value-added employment and sustainable development for the community.*

Here is more information on how to write your vision or mission statement: <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/structure/strategic-planning/vision-mission-statements/main>

For how to formulate a vision please also see "Organization DNA" in the chapter Community Building.

It is crucial that the formulation of both vision and mission statements are decided and formulated in consensus by all members of the SSE initiative. Consider them as the basis on which the initiative will be built upon, acting at the same time as guiding lines. Both statements are often confused. An easy way to distinguish them is as follows:

#### **Vision is about the future, ask yourselves:**

Where do you want to be in the future? How does this future look like? What are the main principles and values that will bring you there?

The vision statement is used to inspire people.

#### **Mission is about today, ask yourselves:**

Who are you? What are you doing?

The mission statement is used to introduce the SSE initiative.

#### **Further resources for getting started:**

Maybe you already know what kind of SSE you would like to start (probably a co-op, a Community Supported Agriculture group (CSA), an intentional community,...). You can find specific guidelines on the Internet. If you don't know yet, such guidelines can nonetheless be helpful and inspirational on your way towards founding a SSE:

5 questions to ask yourselves, if you are planning your co-op:

## tip

How groups develop: forming – storming – norming – performing  
It can really help your group to be aware of these "stages of development" beforehand – many groups experience them – so you understand what is happening as your group changes and how best to deal with any tensions.

<https://transitionnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Overview-of-how-groups-develop.pdf>

<https://www.uk.coop/developing-co-ops/start-co-operative/plan-your-co-op>

10 things to consider when you start a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture):

<https://communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/S.pdf>

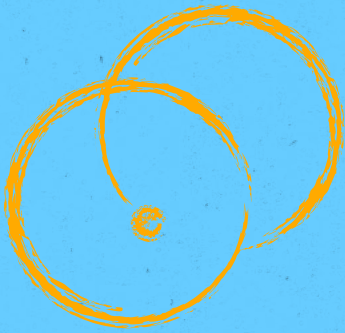
7 aspects for developing an intentional community:

<https://www.gemeinschaftskompass.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Compass-Short-Beta.pdf>



CSA "Ouvertura", Moosbrunn (Austria)





## COMMUNITY BUILDING

SSE start up initiatives rarely boast great infrastructure or financial resources, but it is the people, their skills and knowledge that form the core of SSE. All enterprises need to be supported by building a community to ensure their healthy development, sustainability and resilience.

**Community building** is a field of practices that creates a community within a regional area or around a common good, be it based on a neighbourhood, city or virtual. According to psychiatrist Morgan Scott Peck, a community has to have three essential ingredients: inclusivity, commitment, and consensus.<sup>1</sup> Building a community is also crucial to form lasting bonds between members of an endeavour to ensure the commitment that is needed for developing an economic model that is based on peoples' needs and a common good as a substitute or complement for mainstream economy based on monetary gains.

There are many kinds, shapes and forms of communities and SSE endeavours, and one can imagine an endless variety of projects. Some are very small and contained within a neighbourhood, others can be huge and turn into movements. We are basing on the experiences of the Dobrze Food Co-operative<sup>2</sup> based in Warsaw, Poland with some experience inspired by the Open Jazdów<sup>3</sup> self-managed neighbourhood in the same city.

This chapter is aimed at people who want to improve or establish their own SSE enterprise, start-up or a non-profit initiative from a community perspective. It is a very compact overview on a few useful tools for community building from mapping and planning, to common actions, integration, communication and participatory decision making. The examples presented in this chapter are not an exact prescription for any type of community or initiative but stress the importance of relationships between existing and potential members of an initiative. They are meant to inspire the development of individual community building practices in other parts of the world.

---

<sup>1</sup> Peck, M. S. (1987). *The different drum: Community Making and Peace*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dobrze.waw.pl/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://jazdow.pl/en/>

## WORKING WITH PEOPLE

Community building is not a project that can ever be deemed complete. A community is processual and continually in flux and the efforts put into developing it are more akin to a day-to-day practice than a single task. Team-building can be one of the activities within a community but there is a difference between a team and a community. In the former a limited group of people works towards a common goal, while the latter is based on a genuine bond between at least some of the members. Since relations between members are at the base of community building, fostering the ability of each part of the community to articulate its views, attitudes, and needs as well as creating procedures to address conflict openly and constructively<sup>4</sup> are of utmost importance for a healthy and thriving community. This in turn will create a resilient base for the SSE enterprise and help to develop it creatively in prosperous times and support its operation in times of crisis.

“Communication and community grow in each other's shadows; the possibilities of one are structured by the possibilities of the other.

*E.W. Rothenbuhler,*

### **DECISION MAKING**

Whatever the shape of the endeavour it is fundamental to have a clear idea and rules about how decisions are taken. There are a variety of methods and principles of decision making that will shape the initiative and the relations of the people involved. It is important to remember that involving people in working out solutions together may be more time and energy consuming than top-down management. However there are many benefits, such as a shared feeling of ownership, more lasting decisions that take into account different needs, not excluding minority groups, and simply better and more creative decisions that take advantage of the diversity in membership. This is because inclusive decision making has the advantage of getting to know the needs of participants, rather than just their opinions.

Sharing power and involving people in addressing their needs and jointly shaping a common enterprise performs a crucial function from the perspective of community building. When the group is relatively small, it should be feasible to use consensus for most decisions. This implies opting for solutions that are acceptable to everyone. When the community has grown substantially, some modifications may be needed, such as the introduction of the

<sup>4</sup> Cottrell, L. (1976). The competent community. In B. H. Kaplan, R. N. Wilson & A. H. Leighton (Eds.), *Further explorations in social psychiatry* (pp. 195–209). New York: Basic Books.





If a decision is controversial you can propose to try it out for a specified period of time.

supermajority method. This allows more room for disagreement. Many smaller decisions will have to be taken by working groups or by core members. The more complex the operation, the more it should be clear how decisions are taken and who is allowed to decide on what.

Participatory decision-making can be a complex process, so don't expect quick results or universal agreement. Remember that everyone is different, so not everyone has to share the same enthusiasm for a proposed solution. The key is not to exclude anyone from the process.

### Further reading and resources:

[seedsforchange.org.uk/consensus](https://seedsforchange.org.uk/consensus) – great materials on consensus decision-making and other relevant topics.

[www.loomio.org](https://www.loomio.org) – online tool for inclusive decision-making.



Set a regular date for meetings or use an online scheduling tool (e.g. Framadate) to choose the most inclusive date.

## FACILITATING MEETINGS

Good meetings are vital for the group to feel empowered and motivated. If meetings are ineffective and too long, they can drain the participant's energy, and make them feel tired, confused or go round in circles. A successful meeting will ideally give rise to new ideas, boost involvement and produce tangible results. This may be challenging and depend on many circumstances, but following a few rules and guidelines will help you to become aware of any given issues before things go astray.

Make sure the meeting is announced in advance and that you have a clear agenda of what should be discussed and achieved during the meeting. If there are important things to be discussed, people should be well informed in advance. Leave some space in the agenda for new subjects and ideas. If possible assign roles beforehand: there should at least be a **facilitator** and **note-taker** throughout the meeting, a **timekeeper** can also be useful. Sort the different points according to urgency/priority and try to estimate how much time you will need for each point. Matters requiring discussion and decisions need more time, so it is useful to share as much information as possible before the meeting and be ready to present the subject matter in a concise form before the discussion.



Take regular breaks and try to find a venue accessible and inclusive for everyone. Make sure everyone can hear and see well, and that they are comfortable.

The facilitator plays a key role during the meeting. While most people will concentrate on the content of the things being dis-

cussed the facilitator's role is to take care of the process, that is to keep track of time (it's easier to have a separate timekeeper!), make sure the meeting is inclusive (this can be the task of a separate person too) and that everyone is sticking to the subject. The facilitator should also structure the discussion and lead it towards conclusions and decisions. Some key things for the facilitator to keep in mind are:

- Agree on communication rules and make sure no-one breaks them.
- Keep an eye on the aim of the meeting or agenda point and try not lose time by diverging too much from the subject.
- Keep as many people involved as possible, don't let the same people speak all the time.
- Listen carefully to the different voices, clarify them and give structure to the discussion.
- Be careful not to fill silences (sometimes people need time to think, or to prepare to speak)

Another important role is that of the note-taker. Meeting memos should be available to everyone and well structured. No-one likes to read lengthy notes of everything everyone has said, so focus on getting down the decisions taken as well as the proposals, challenges and actions planned. Every meeting should conclude with the next steps to be taken: what, who, and when. The notes should be available to other participants to verify or correct if needed.

In the case of **online meetings** you need to take care of additional things.

- Test the system in advance. Whichever tools you decide to use make sure you know exactly how they work and reserve time to explain them to other participants.
- Teach everyone to use the "mute" function when they're not speaking and use microphones for better sound quality.
- Be verbal about whatever is happening during the meeting and who's turn it is to speak. During online meetings eye contact and body language are very limited.
- Prepare and use collaborative online tools to enhance participation and diversify methods.

### **Further reading and resources:**

**Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making**, Sam Kaner with Lenny Lind, Catherine Toldi, Sarah Fisk and Duane Berger, Jossey-Bass, 2007, ISBN: 978-0-7879-8266-9



[seedsforchange.org.uk/meeting](https://seedsforchange.org.uk/meeting) and [seedsforchange.org.uk/facilitationmeeting](https://seedsforchange.org.uk/facilitationmeeting)

– hands-on guides to conducting effective meetings and facilitation.

[www.kialo.com](https://www.kialo.com) – online tool for structuring complex discussions. Can be used to prepare ground before taking a decision or before a strategic meeting.

## GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK

Building and maintaining healthy relations within the project, especially within teams and working groups requires the skills to communicate both positive and negative things, the ability to address emotional states and work out constructive solutions. Regularly giving and receiving feedback is a great way to evaluate activities, keeping up-to-date with co-workers and resolving tensions before they develop into arguments and conflicts.

There are however a few things to keep in mind for the feedback to work as intended.

- First of all choose the right moment. The person you are addressing should be ready and willing to receive feedback and not overworked, very tired, distressed, etc.
- Be honest and specific, present your point of view and express how the aspects mentioned have affected you.
- Remember to only address actions and behaviour, not the personality of the receiving person. It is much easier and useful to agree on something that could have been done differently than to quarrel about how someone is or isn't.
- Get the person involved: ask how they see the issue and encourage him or her to propose a solution.
- Make sure the feedback is constructive and useful for the person concerned.
- Don't focus solely on the negative parts of the situation, make sure to mention what you appreciate.



Generally avoid giving negative feedback to an unprepared person in front of other people not to put them in a defensive position.

It is just as important to know how to give feedback as well as receive it. Receiving feedback can also give you hints on the kind of things you should avoid when giving feedback yourself. When you are on the receiving end, remember to listen attentively to everything that is being said. Don't interrupt (verbally and non-verbally), and don't get defensive. Consider the information to be the sole opinion of another person and an important source of information. The act of receiving feedback is sometimes difficult, but it is a good way to learn and develop.

## Further reading:

<https://seedsforchange.org.uk/feedback> – short, handy guide on giving and receiving feedback.

## KNOWING YOUR COMMUNITY

While there is an abundance of ideas on what to do to build and include others in a community it is good to know beforehand where you stand, who you are dealing with, and who you want to reach. Take a look at a few tools that will help you get to know your group and the community around it.

## ORGANIZATIONAL DNA

Before you set out to communicate your message to the world, or even within your group, it is good to know where you stand, and who you actually are as an organization or initiative. This is a question of building your identity and collective culture. Below is a set of questions that address the core values and ideas behind your project. Invite co-founders and members alike to

### Good practice: Communicating via shop vitrines

To communicate on what the co-operative is, and on the values it represents, the vitrines of both our shops were adorned with drawings, short facts about the co-op and slogans. Now every passer-by can read how many members we have, what kind of products we sell, and that we co-operate with local farmers.



Dobrze Food Co-op shop vitrine at 27 Andersa str., Warsaw



answer these together and share the results. Together you can work out the vision and mission of your initiative:

- What problem do you want to solve?
- What is the solution (do you have a vision of the solution)?
- What values do you communicate?
- Are those values reflected in action?
- What is the role of your initiative in solving the problem?
- What is your personal role?
- What are your concrete, measurable goals?



You can organize an “away day” for the committed group and immerse yourselves in working out the mission and vision of the project.

Looking for clarity in the common answers will help you create a consistent image both inside and outside. Once you have a clearly expressed vision and mission you can check every action plan and strategy against them.

## CIRCLES OF COMMITMENT

Inevitably in every project or group, people's engagement differs according to their role (e.g. producer, consumer, coordinator), personal motivation, abilities and circumstances (this especially concerns larger and more complex projects). It is very helpful to

### Good practice: Picnics & celebrations

Celebration is an important part of working with and in a community. Every year we celebrate the co-op's birthday and have picnics, workshops and smaller gatherings. At the general assemblies there should always be snacks, cakes and tea. Members are encouraged to organize integration events.



6th birthday of the Dobrze Co-op.

realize that people will always occupy different positions within the organization and because of that, also have different needs and expectations. A helpful tool is to visualize the whole community in circles where the innermost circle is the committed core team, while the outermost are potential new members. The circles in between can be committed members, working groups, contributors, occasional volunteers, crowd, etc., depending on the project type. The key point of doing this is to distinguish the different needs the groups may have, and plan for different actions to address the specific groups. The core team may for example need specific management or communication training, while contributors are better addressed with an integration event or open seminar.

You can also reflect on how to involve people more deeply, and encourage them to move towards the inner circles of commitment. Sharing information and responsibility wisely can lead the crowd members to become committed.

### Further reading:

[www.thechangeagency.org/circles-of-commitment](http://www.thechangeagency.org/circles-of-commitment) – an example of using this method in the context of campaigns.

**Purpose Driven Campaigning** by Make Believe – source text that inspired this method (download it here: [www.jrmyprtr.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/purpose-driven-campaigning.pdf](http://www.jrmyprtr.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/purpose-driven-campaigning.pdf))

## REACHING OUT

No group or project is suspended in a vacuum. Developing the community has to work both inwards and outwards. While working on communication and relations within the community, it is important to reach out for new members and look for alliances among other social actors and relevant movements. (See also **Circles of Commitment** above)

## POWER MAPPING

Power mapping is a visual tool used mainly for social campaigns, but it can be applied to any type of endeavour that can benefit from a planned outreach and communications strategy. In its basic form the tool serves to map out all possible social actors



Map the groups by thinking what kind of commitment are given members willing to make in the organization.

” You need to learn to think and speak like the person you are trying to reach.  
*Purpose driven campaign, Make Believe*





Involve a diverse group in the mapping part to get a more complete result.

that you see in relation to your project. These can be politicians, Local Government, media, neighbours, other organizations or whatever entities you think are relevant to your cause. These are placed on two kinds of axes according to how influential they are in your society, and the extent to which they agree with your values and goals. This kind of map will allow you to visualise the potentials for co-operation, recruitment or awareness-raising in the wider community.

Usually the map will result with the points aligned in a more or less diagonal stripe with influential and negative actors at one end, and weak but positive on the other. Whatever your plan and strategy it is good to keep a few general assumptions in mind:

- If you want to convince someone, focus on the groups that are around the middle. These are (at least theoretically) undecided people that may potentially support your cause in the future.
- The positive side of the map are actors you may want to collaborate with or support. There should be no need to convince them of your values.
- At the other extreme are actors that are negative or even hostile. There's no point in wasting your energy addressing your communication to them. Weaken their influence if you can.



Focus your map on a specific type of actor (e.g. the media), to get results relevant to your goal.

In subsequent stages of the mapping you can focus on particular groups and even individual people to see what access you have to them and what leverage you can use.

### Further reading:

[www.thechangeagency.org](http://www.thechangeagency.org) – browse this site for an in-depth explanation of the power mapping tool and its use.

[beautifulrising.org/tool/power-mapping](http://beautifulrising.org/tool/power-mapping) – another take on the tool.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jSS367drdQ0> – video explaining the method.

### **Good practice: Empowering member initiative**

The richness of the community stems from the diversity and ingenuity of its members. By facilitating ways to reveal the members' talents and by shaping the activities of the enterprise according to skills and ideas of the members, benefits the whole community, and members become more committed to the co-operative.

## INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

It is important to maintain connections to a wider, international movement and so help empower the local members by showing them that there are many more people in the world struggling with similar challenges and hopes. International cooperation can also be a great help in developing and enriching the local community.

It is important for people to realize that they are not alone in their struggles, that they are part of a greater whole. And while it is essential to develop your ideas locally, based on your particular circumstances; many people in other places do things that can inspire your collective work and help you to develop new ideas.

It is commonplace for similar initiatives to network and communicate internationally, so make sure to take a look around and ask others for interesting initiatives and movements.

See **last chapter** for useful contacts and directions.



General Assembly of the Dobrze Food co-op. Photo: Kasia Kalinowska





## CO-OPERATIVES

Cooperativism encompasses a range of cooperative practices and values that challenge the status quo while, at the same time, creating alternative modes of economic, cultural, social, and political life. Throughout the 20th century, cooperative modes of organising social, cultural, and economic life proved to be viable alternatives to centrally planned or capitalist modes of production, distribution, and consumption, and in the recent years have emerged with new dynamism.<sup>1</sup>

Cooperativism as the social movement strives to foster social and economic rights and meet everyday needs of people through voluntary associations called co-operatives.

---

<sup>1</sup> See: Vieta, Marcelo: The New Cooperativism. Affinities Journal, Vol 4, No 1 (2010): The New Cooperativism. <https://ojs.library.queensu.ca/index.php/affinities/issue/view/574>

## WHAT IS A CO-OPERATIVE?

Although examples of different forms of self-help or economic cooperation can be found throughout all historical eras, the roots of the current co-operative movement go back to workers and consumers who organised as a response to the harsh social and economic situation inflicted on people by the expansion of industrial capitalism in the 18th and 19th centuries. Co-operatives evolved as a unique organisational form with its own tradition, original defining features and set of values and principles. The current commonly used definition is that of the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) – the largest global umbrella organisation of national and international co-operative organisations.

### **BASIC STRUCTURE OF A CO-OPERATIVE**

Co-operatives are democratically managed organisations. It means that in an ideal case, each member has one vote. The principle of 'one person, one vote' is one of the historical cornerstones of co-operatives. The most important decisions are taken by all co-op members at a general assembly. The members also decide about the use of all profits. Therefore it is important to know and apply methods of democratic decision making (see Chapter 2). But even in this type of organisation, the division of labour and delegation of power exists. The structure of co-operatives differs depending upon the type and the scale of any given co-op. In larger co-ops with more members, power is delegated to the board of directors who are elected by the general assembly for practical reasons. The board of directors manages everyday operations of the co-operative and hire employees if

#### **Definition of a co-operative**

A co-operative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.

Co-operatives are operating in all sectors of economy and we can distinguish three main types:

- workers or producers co-operatives (including collective farms)
- consumers co-operatives
- credit unions.

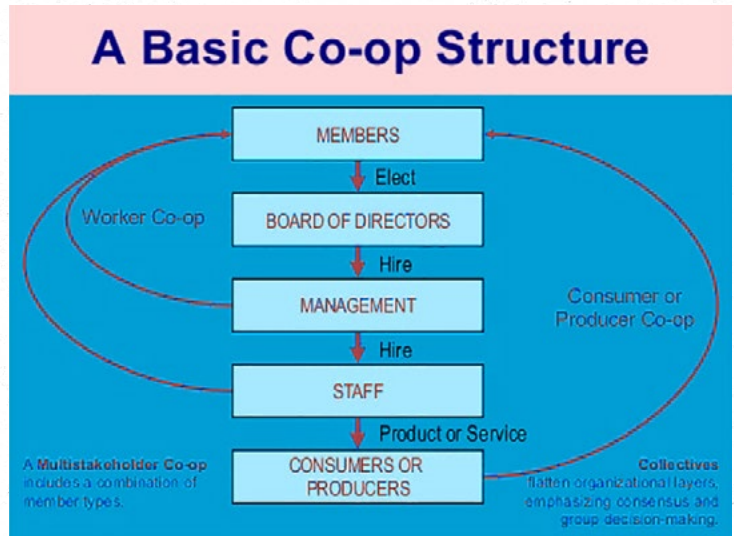




For inspiration, try to get a sample of by-laws either from another co-operative, from an institution that supports the establishment of co-operatives, or simply by searching the Internet.

Example: <https://www.uk.coop/developing-co-ops/model-governing-documents>

and as required. The structure of the co-operative is stipulated in its by-laws.



Picture 1: a basic co-op structure

## HOW IT ALL BEGAN

In the year 1844, the Society of Equitable Pioneers was established in Rochdale. It is considered the first modern co-operative, mostly because the Rochdale Pioneers designed the famous Rochdale Principles, a set of principles of cooperation that inspired the creation of the modern co-operative movement and stand at the foundation of values and principles of the ICA. Shortly after the Rochdale Pioneers co-operative, many others were established throughout Europe. In the Central and Eastern European context it is interesting to note that one of the oldest modern-era co-operative was established in Slovakia – Spolok gazdovský, a credit union designed to provide financial services to smallholder farmers and artisans. It was founded just a few months after the establishment of the Rochdale co-operative, hence becoming the first credit union in continental Europe.

## CO-OPERATIVE VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

### Co-operative values

Co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity. In the tradition of

their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

## **Co-operative Principles**

The co-operative principles are guidelines by which co-operatives put their values into practice.

### **1. Voluntary and Open Membership**

Co-operatives are voluntary organisations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.

### **2. Democratic Member Control**

Co-operatives are democratic organisations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the members. In primary co-operatives members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote) and co-operatives at other levels are also organised in a democratic manner.

### **3. Economic Participation of Members**

Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control the capital of their co-operative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the co-operative. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing their co-operative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the co-operative and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

### **4. Autonomy and Independence**

Co-operatives are autonomous, self-help organisations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organisations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their co-operative autonomy.



## **5. Education, Training, and Information**

Co-operatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-operatives. They inform the general public – particularly young people and opinion leaders – about the nature and benefits of cooperation.

## **6. Cooperation among Co-operatives**

Co-operatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the co-operative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.

## **7. Concern for Community**

Co-operatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.

## **THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT**

Co-operatives started to mutually collaborate and create umbrella organisations very early. The ICA was founded in London during the first international co-operative congress in 1895. To this day, the alliance facilitates the implementation of the 6th co-operative principle to boost cooperation between co-operatives. It develops relationships between members, organises regional and international meetings, disseminates know-how and prepares training programmes and publications. Part of ICA's effort is to protect and promote the co-operative identity that sets co-operatives apart from other types of enterprises and protects the co-operative identity.

One of the global events supporting the co-operative movement and disseminating its ideas is The International Day of Co-operatives, which takes place every first Saturday in July.

### **Facts and figures**

The co-operative movement is a global movement:

There are more than 3 million co-operatives worldwide

Over 12 percent of the global population are members of co-operatives

Co-operatives employ 280 million people worldwide, which is around 10 percent of world's working population.



Picture 2: ICA COOP common branding <https://identity.coop>

## COOPERATIVISM AS PART OF SSE

The co-operative movement and Social Solidarity Economy were founded for similar reasons and follow a similar set of values and principles. The co-operative movement first started to emerge as a response to severe living conditions of the working class and people who were excluded from official economic relations. A key aim was to tackle poverty and social exclusion. Contrary to capitalist enterprises that seek to maximize profits, co-operatives have always been based on self-help, mutualism, caring for the local community and peaceful relations between people.

Nowadays, prevailing economic relations and practices still mainly serve the most efficient accumulation of capital and the interests of the capitalist class. This dynamic has brought us to the brink of social, economic and environmental catastrophe. Hence, the need for the transformation of economic and social relations is still the slogan of the day. The aim of SSE is to create better working conditions by democratising the decision-making processes within enterprises that ensure that each person has the same voice. It is also focused on a just division and distribution of profits, and the needs of both workers and local communities. Co-operatives that adhere to the principle of one-member-one-vote are a very good tool for ensuring these aims. Co-ops are often committed to serving the needs of their local community. Where co-operatives really honour and follow co-operative values, principles and related procedures in practice, they have the potential to be something like “schools of democracy”. Democratic decision-making can be used as an example for the SSE movement in their effort to make society more democratic in the broadest sense.



Although the present situation varies from one country to the next, reflecting also the history of the co-operative movement in each specific context, co-operatives can still be considered a rather popular and wide-spread SSE organisational form. This is not just a pure historical coincidence: co-operative values and principles in their essence convey the spirit of solidarity, mutual aid and human well-being fostered also by other SSE organisations and initiatives.

Recently, the new cooperative movement revived the idea of co-operativism within SSE. It has been deliberately striving to create environmentally sustainable alternatives to the current system of global capitalism that destroys the planetary ecosystem and threatens the very existence of life on Earth. Hence many SSE community initiatives such as Community Supported Agriculture, and many others (see some examples in part 4. of this chapter), are either run as a co-operative or may overtime establish and formalise themselves as a co-operative. New co-operatives are usually smaller-scale enterprises that emphasize the full observance of co-operative principles and cultivation of ethical principles of solidarity, social justice, decent work and concern for the community. An important theme is to create non-hierarchical relations as alternatives to the prevalent power structures of domination and oppression.

The new co-operative movement can be seen as a laboratory for change, exploring and creating new sustainable social realities through different kinds of praxis. Members of co-operatives learn about politics, the economy, social movements, degrowth and the like, and they have a chance to experience non-violent communication and consensual decision-making. New co-operatives are about the creation of safe spaces and social networks, mutual support and the use of the Commons in practice. Most new co-ops predominantly serve their local or (sub)regional communities, which reduces their carbon footprints and lessens the impact on the environment. Moreover, within the current co-operative movement, there is a growing awareness of environmental issues and many co-ops deliberately strive to take action to tackle the global climate change.

Even in Central and Eastern European countries were co-operatives are often perceived negatively as something that is associated with their “communist” past, the previous negative attitudes towards co-operatives have been gradually changing.

## HOW TO START A CO-OP<sup>2</sup>

The situation is different from country to country. The basis is always specific legislation on social solidarity economy or co-operatives. But you have to answer several simple questions that can help you to develop a primary idea for setting up your co-operative.

### **Contact a support organisation initially**

Setting up a community co-operative can be daunting, but chances are that there are experienced organisations out there ready to help, so contact them first to find out what help is available. (See also TIP 2.)

### **Form a working group/committee**

A committee is required to take on the responsibility of managing and leading your community group to set up your community co-op.

### **Consider your vision and how best to explain what you are trying to do**

Your committee will need to have clear aims and objectives from the outset and set out roles and responsibilities.

### **Identify and consult with your community**

By consulting with the immediate community and surrounding area, you will be able to gauge the level of support there is for the project. It will also help you to establish whether the community members are willing to invest in the project, and if they are, how much. By consulting with the wider community, you are creating the opportunity to get feedback on your ideas and the inclusion of new ones not yet considered. It will also give you the opportunity to identify people with relevant skills to get involved. Questionnaires and public meetings are good ways to consult with your community, and remember to share your results with everyone.

### **Visit other enterprises to get inspiration**

Talk to people who have already gone through the process, and learn from them about what – and what not – to do. Review original plans and determine whether to proceed



There is usually some supportive structure (institution), either public or private, that can help you with establishing a co-op. It can be a co-op association or union or another co-operative. Try to find out first.

Example of a supporting organisation: <https://www.uk.coop/developing-co-ops>

---

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from <https://www.stirtoaction.com/magazine-issues/issue-17>



### **Formalise your preparation process**

Committees should consist of a minimum of three people, and a maximum of twelve. At the very least, a committee should consist of a Chair, Secretary and Treasurer. It is also good practice to have 4-6 others with specific roles to lead sub committees, with experience such as marketing, fundraising and business planning. These experts could either be future members of the co-op or they can be external consultants e.g. from some supporting organisation.

### **Research and Decide on your Legal Structure**

Do research on your national legislation regarding SSE organisations and co-operatives and learn about all legal requirements for incorporation and for running a business as a co-operative. (See also TIP 2.)

### **Determine start-up costs and consider business plan**

A business plan is a valuable tool for setting out your aims and objectives for your community co-op. Your business plan will also include financial forecasts, including the initial set-up costs and on-going costs and from this, determine how much money the business needs to raise through initial fundraising and future sales in order to be viable and sustainable.

### **Consider finance options and raise funds**

Community fundraising events and requests for donations are an important way of engaging with the community and raising finance. You can also apply for grants and sell community shares.

### **Secure Premises and Plan for Opening**

#### **Celebrate your success with an opening event**

The official opening day is a celebratory event that all of the community should be invited to and encouraged to attend. This is your opportunity to show all the hard work that has been going on, and the ideal opportunity to market the co-op to your local community and the wider services you now offer.

#### **Constantly review and engage with your members and customers!**

## **GOOD PRACTICES**

Co-operatives operate in many sectors of human economic activity – be it manufacturing, sales of products, farming or various types of services provision ranging from health care or social services to car repairs. Also the number of co-operatives currently operating in the world is astonishing and the scope of their activity is very vast. In this section we hence selected only a few examples of co-operatives from different parts of the world and different areas of their activity.

### **Home Green Home, USA**

A worker-owned natural cleaning service co-operative founded and owned by Latino women in the San Francisco area. The mission of the co-operative is to provide employment to immigrant women to improve their quality of life and enhance their socio-economic stability. The co-operative provides cleaning services with ecological products. Its members are committed to taking care of people's health and the environment. The co-operative was established with the vision of being a replicable business model for other women in the Latino community, and to support a democratic and inclusive community economy. [www.homegreenhomesf.com](http://www.homegreenhomesf.com)

### **Humana Nova, Croatia**

Social Cooperative Humana Nova Čakovec employs disabled and other socially excluded people through the production and sales of textile products made from ecological and recycled fabrics. The mission of the co-operative is to economically and socially empower the poor and socially marginalised and provide an environmentally sustainable alternative to the mass production of clothing and to diminish the negative environmental impacts of the textile industry – one of the most polluting and waste-producing global industries. <http://www.humananova.org>

### **Cooperation Jackson, USA**

Cooperation Jackson is an organisation founded to develop an economically uplifting democratic "solidarity economy" in Jackson, Mississippi. Its aims are to develop a series of independent but connected institutions and enterprises which can empower residents of Jackson, especially those who are poor, unemployed, black, or Latino. Cooperation Jackson aims to carry out a vision of a radically democratic city. One big piece of this goal involves establishing a network of worker co-opera-



tives and co-operative institutions as the way to build community wealth, stability, racial equity, and economic democracy. Several co-operatives already exist as part of the Cooperation Jackson network. These include lawn care business The Green Team, organic vegetable farm Freedom Farms, and print shop The Center for Community Production, which also operates a 3D printer. These co-operatives try to alleviate causes of poverty and discrimination while operating in an ecologically sustainable manner. There is also a co-operative incubator called the Balagoon Center. The organisation owns about three hectares of land which it operates as a community land trust.

<https://cooperationjackson.org>

### **Green Energy Cooperative, Croatia**

The main aim of the Croatian co-operative Zelena energetska zadruga (ZEZ) or Green Energy Cooperative, established in 2013, is to help people and their communities to transform energy production in more democratic and sustainable way. It promotes the idea that energy production should be in the hands of people who should be able to participate in planning and producing their energy. ZEZ is supporting the establishment of other energy co-ops and deals with the management and financing of renewable energy sources and energy efficiency projects. The co-operative is working with local communities, but also with partners on the European level.

<http://www.zez.coop>

### **Tři ocásci, the Czech Republic**

The co-operative café, restaurant and confectionery located in Brno, Czech Republic serves Fair Trade coffee and vegan meals. It subscribes to the principles of slow food and its space also hosts the “Underground university” organising educational events and a library where people can share their books. Their mission is to foster human rights and non-violence, to build informed and confident civil society and promote economic alternatives that serve the people, not profit.

<https://triocasci.cz/en/>

### **KKFU Cooperative, Ghana**

Kuapa Kokoo Cooperative Cocoa Farmers and Marketing Union Limited (KKFU) is a producer of ethical cocoa beans. It is a cocoa farmers’ co-operative union with over 100,000 registered members who are primarily smallholder cocoa farmers in six cocoa growing regions. The vision of the members was to have a direct role in the purchasing and the marketing of their products. KKFU gained Fair trade certification in 1995, to supply ethically produced

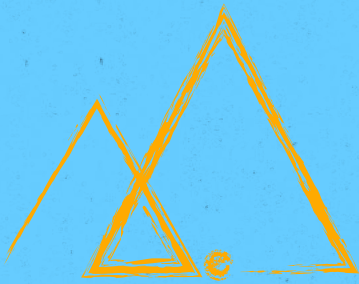
cocoa beans to the certified market. This made Kuapa Kokoo the first Fairtrade-Certified smallholder farmers' organisation in West Africa. Additionally, the organisation has gained both UTZ and Rainforest Alliance certification status enabling it to sell certified cocoa beans under these two schemes. The co-op's mission has the welfare of its farmer members at its heart and aims to empower them in their efforts to gain a dignified livelihood. It strives to empower small-scale cocoa producers, enhance female participation in the decision-making process through gender mainstreaming, and encourage environmentally sustainable production.

<https://www.kuapakokoo.com>



Fair & Bio Roasters co-operative. Photo: Jakub Hrab





## FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

The eminent goal for the humanity is to ensure enough safe and nutritious food for everyone, i.e. to provide Food Security. However from the long term perspective this is not enough. If we consider that most of cases of famine in modern history did not happen due to insufficient food stocks. They happened because of poverty and exploitation.

In contrast to Food Security, Food Sovereignty aims to guarantee sustainable agricultural practice with respect for nature and the rights of all people without exception. It is deeply linked to fundamental questions of power and democracy. As Nettie Weibe of the Via Campesina says: “Who controls food producing resources such as land, water, seeds and genetic resources, and for what purpose? Who gets to decide what is grown, how and where it is grown and for whom? Food Sovereignty includes the necessary discourse about power, freedom, democracy, equality, justice, sustainability and culture. Food is taken out of the realm of being primarily a market commodity and re-embedded in the social, ecological, cultural and local contexts as a source of nutrition, livelihood, meaning and relationships.”

### Further reading and resources:

An in-depth guide to food sovereignty by La Via Campesina

[www.eurovia.org/food-sovereignty-how-an-in-depth-guide/](http://www.eurovia.org/food-sovereignty-how-an-in-depth-guide/)

## FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AND SSE

SSE and Food Sovereignty concepts share the common principles of targeting the root causes of a problem. Fulfilling the main principles of Food Sovereignty equally implies applying the basics of SSE. Cooperation, participation, solidarity, environmental sustainability and radical democracy are the common values of SSE and Food Sovereignty concepts. This is further amplified in agroecology. Both the Nyéléni Declaration on Agroecology (2015) and the FAO 10 Elements of agroecology include mention of SSE. Because it is only if we manage to change the dominant economic paradigm and mainstream SSE that we will realise genuine societal change, including in the field of Food Sovereignty.

” *Food Sovereignty is considered a basic human right, recognized and implemented by communities, peoples, States and international bodies.*  
*Nyéleni declaration on Food Sovereignty, 2007*

## FOOD RELATED CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

### **CHALLENGE: ONE OF 9 PEOPLE SUFFER FROM HUNGER**

The so-called “Green Revolution” in the 20th century globalized industrial agriculture and soon resulted in severalfold higher yields, based on widespread use of pesticides and artificial fertilisers as well as hybrid and Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs). This may have led to some decline in the number of the people facing hunger, but after some years it created soil depletion and a loss in yields. This model is one of the main causes of the climate change. As a result we can see millions of farmers leaving their territories and migrating to the cities. It is not only a problem about hunger and production, this is also a territorial and social issue. Although the fight to eradicate hunger continues, the double burden of disease from those overweight and suffering from NCDs (Non-communicable diseases such as heart problems and diabetes) is equal to that of under-nourishment, as the number of people suffering from undernourishment is on the rise again<sup>1</sup>. Global trade often means that food from regions threatened the most by hunger is exported, rather than supporting sustainable local food systems. The exception to this is Fair Trade.

---

<sup>1</sup> The state of food security and nutrition in the world, 2019 [online]. FAO, 2019. <http://www.fao.org/state-of-food-security-nutrition/en/>



## SOLUTION:

### **FOOD FOR PEOPLE NOT CROPS FOR PROFIT!**

The current situation concerning food systems and nutrition is absurd. There are currently over 820 million undernourished people in the world and the number of overweight or obese people is estimated as in excess of 2 billion in 2019.<sup>2</sup> It is essential to stop confusing calorie intake and nutrition. Industrially processed foods have a high calorie count but are not healthy. Agroecologically grown local food cooked from scratch may be lower in calories, but contains far more vital nutrition. Meanwhile about one third of all food is wasted at different levels of the food chain. This varies from 56% in the industrial food chain to as little as 6% in Community Supported Agriculture.<sup>3</sup> Another side of enormous wasting is linked to growing crops to feed industrially raised livestock. Globally, animal production is responsible for half of Greenhouse Gas Emissions from food. A further challenge is where land and water are used for the production of biofuel rather than food to feed local communities. There is more than enough food currently available to feed all of humanity, including the projected growth in human population, but many people lack access to the food that is produced. This is why it is essential to support local food systems, peasant agriculture for local consumption. Principally we need to rethink the attitude towards food: Food must stop being considered as a commodity. Agriculture needs to be removed from the WTO, and food needs to become part of our Commons again.

---

<sup>2</sup> Obesity and overweight, 2020 [online]. WHO, 2020. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/obesity-and-overweight>

<sup>3</sup> A comparative analysis of community supported agriculture and UK supermarkets as food systems with specific reference to food waste, 2014 [online]. Nigel Baker, CAWR, 2014. <https://www.canalsidecommunityfood.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/CSA-and-UK-supermarkets-as-food-systems-with-specific-reference-to-food-waste-Nigel-Baker-2014.pdf>

### **Who feeds the majority of population? Small farmers!**

The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) reports that majority of the 570 million farms in the world are small. Small-holders supply 80% of overall food produced in Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America through farmers, artisan fisher folk, pastoralists, landless and indigenous People's production. In addition, 70% of the 1.4 billion extremely poor people live in rural areas and 75% of these rural poor are also smallholders."

## CHALLENGE: LOSS OF SOIL AND BIODIVERSITY

Another challenge is that of soil erosion and the degradation of soil quality. “We must stop soil erosion to save our future”, stressed Mr. Mansur. “It takes up to 1,000 years to form one centimeter of top soil, but this one centimeter can be lost with just one heavy rainfall if soil cover is not protected”.<sup>4</sup> Industrial agriculture is basically turning fields into desert areas that are uninhabitable for any other organisms than the designed crops with heavy support of added chemicals. The loss of biodiversity is even undermining the stability of ecosystems upon which we all rely.

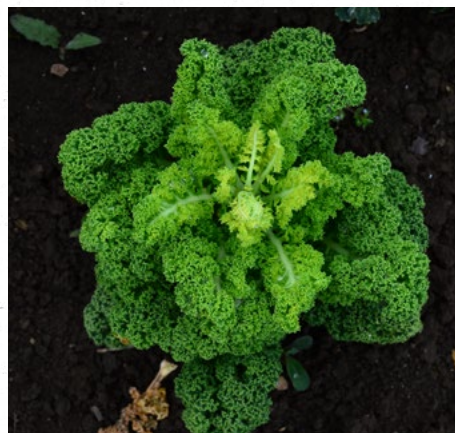


Photo: Ecumenical Academy

## SOLUTION: AGROECOLOGY FOR SUSTAINABILITY

We, as humans are part of nature; therefore we need to respect all other living beings. By showing respect, we can learn how to use the natural dynamics and ensure both high yields and biodiversity. Biodiversity is an essential aspect of stability and sustainability. According to Miguel Altieri, one of the promoters of Academic researches and alliances between University and farmers organization to build Agroecology, there are three key pillars to agroecological practice. It is a scientific discipline, a set of practices and also a social movement. These aspects have all been built into the FAO 10 Elements of Agroecology, with clear reference to solidarity economy. The application of agroecological practices prevents the need for using artificial fertilizers and pesticides. Many of the practices also lower the use of fossil fuels and improve the ecosystem functions – a key aspect in fighting the climate crisis.

### Further reading and resources:

La Via Campesina in Action for Climate Justice

[www.boell.de/sites/default/files/radical\\_realism\\_for\\_climate\\_justice\\_volume\\_44\\_6\\_1.pdf?dimension1=ds\\_radicalrealism](http://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/radical_realism_for_climate_justice_volume_44_6_1.pdf?dimension1=ds_radicalrealism)

Declaration on Agroecology from the Nyéléni movement

<http://www.foodsovereignty.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Download-declaration-Agroecology-Nyeleni-2015.pdf>

FAO's 10 elements of Agroecology (Guiding the transition to sustainable food and agricultural systems) <http://www.fao.org/3/I9037EN/i9037en.pdf>

---

<sup>4</sup> Soil erosion must be stopped 'to save our future', says UN agriculture agency, 2019 [online]. UN, 2019. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/12/1052831>



## **CHALLENGE: PROBLEM OF POWER DISTRIBUTION**

A paradigm of maximization of the financial profit at all costs is another challenge. In addition to the exploitation of agricultural lands and natural habitats, peoples' rights are not being respected. Underpaid work has become normalised and there are even many cases of slave labor and illegal land grabbing. The big agribusiness companies are favoured preferentially compared with the small-scale family farms: around 70% of the direct payments of the CAP (the European Union Common Agricultural Policy) are still going to only 20% of the farmers. The consequence is that the farms are disappearing at an alarming rate; between 2003 and 2013 just over 4 million small-holdings (over one quarter of all farms) disappeared in the EU, while the total area used for agriculture remained almost stable. This means increasing agricultural concentration, with a 38% increase in the average area of EU farms, from 11.7 hectares in 2003 to 16.1 hectares in 2013.<sup>5</sup>

## **SOLUTION: LOCALIZED DEMOCRATIC ORGANIZATION AND PEOPLE'S RIGHTS**

Capitalism and hierarchical forms of organisation of society oppose the sustainability of our agriculture, and undermine this keystone of our civilization. To change the paradigm we need to support, nourish and share the alternatives. We have to spread the principles of radical democracy, imagine so-called utopias, and advocate for appropriate changes. Hopefully some of the work by the various social movements, including RIPESS on a Common Food Policy Plan, the Farm to Fork Strategy and the Green Deal will bring about greater equity for both small-holder farmers under CAP and an overall approach to agriculture that emphasizes the importance of agroecology, the need to ban industrial farming, and greater social and environmental equity for producers and consumers alike. To succeed, we need strong



Photo: Ecumenical Academy

<sup>5</sup> Farm structure survey 2013 – While area used for agriculture remained stable, over 1 out of 4 farms disappeared between 2003 and 2013 in the EU – Almost a third of holding managers aged 65 or over, 2015 [online]. Eurostat, 2015. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STAT\\_15\\_6175](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STAT_15_6175)

communities and movements, shared knowledge and skills, and to build our collective resilience.

### **Further reading and resources:**

The six main principles of Food Sovereignty [grassrootsonline.org/sites/default/files/The-6-Food-Sovereignty-Principles.pdf](https://grassrootsonline.org/sites/default/files/The-6-Food-Sovereignty-Principles.pdf)

A letter questioning the CAP

[www.foeeurope.org/sites/default/files/agriculture/2016/ngos\\_letter\\_-\\_cap\\_fitness\\_check\\_final\\_version\\_for\\_publication\\_tuesday\\_morning2.pdf](http://www.foeeurope.org/sites/default/files/agriculture/2016/ngos_letter_-_cap_fitness_check_final_version_for_publication_tuesday_morning2.pdf)

## **ISN'T IT JUST A UTOPIA?**

A novel study shows how local agroecology can feed all Europeans. In September 2018 the French IDDRI Institute published a study highlighting the possible consequences of an agroecological restructuring of European agriculture.

Agroecology could ensure the food sufficiency of the European population (based on the estimated rise of population to 530 million people in 2050). What is the prerequisite for this change? Healthy eating habits! More cereals, fruit, vegetables and protein-containing plants and fewer animal products.

Applying agroecology would eliminate the need of using chemical pesticides and mineral fertilizers, and improve sustainability without impairing the productivity. It would prevent the loss of biodiversity and conserve natural resources, as well as contributing to significant decrease of agriculture-related greenhouse gasses emissions (down to 40%).<sup>6</sup>

### **Further reading and resources:**

Would you like to read the whole study? Here you can download it for free

[www.iddri.org/en/publications-and-events/study/agroecological-europe-2050-multifunctional-agriculture-healthy-eating](https://www.iddri.org/en/publications-and-events/study/agroecological-europe-2050-multifunctional-agriculture-healthy-eating)

Watch a short video about successful application of agroecology principles in Cuba [youtube.com/watch?v=TZ0tovrhf5Y](https://youtube.com/watch?v=TZ0tovrhf5Y)

---

<sup>6</sup> An agroecological Europe in 2050: multifunctional agriculture for healthy eating, 2019, [online]. Poux, X. et Aubert, P. IDDRI, 2019. <https://www.iddri.org/en/publications-and-events/study/agroecological-europe-2050-multifunctional-agriculture-healthy-eating>



## CASE STUDIES

### **GELA OCHSENHERZ**

“ *Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.*

*Margaret Mead (1901 – 1978)  
American cultural anthropologist*

It's Friday and you will find a very special stand on Vienna's probably best-known market, the "Naschmarkt". People come by and enjoy the wonderful vegetables, salads and spices. A couple points at some vegetables and say: "We would like to buy 1/2 kg of that". On the other side of the stand the person in charge replies in a friendly manner: "We are awfully sorry, but we do not sell anything! That's because all the vegetables go to our members. We do not buy and sell, although our members contribute to our farm financially. This means that the producers and prosumers – those who "share the harvest" – not only share the benefits of a good harvest but also accept and share the risks related to agriculture." The couple is then invited to taste the vegetables for free and asked to consider to become a member.

The couple watches other people arrive and take vegetable out of boxes without weighing and without paying. Some signs say: "Plenty of this" or "Just a little of this". The principles are: Members take whatever they need for cooking in the upcoming week – at the same time taking care of the needs of the other members.

We are talking about Austria's first CSA called "GeLa Ochsenherz" which is located 30 km from Vienna and which will celebrate its 10th anniversary in 2021. The basic idea of the CSA is: that members contribute financially over a whole Season (one year).

This enables the association to employ gardeners and other staff throughout the year, and also to finance buying seeds and any equipment required. Members and employees are members of a Steering Committee that runs the SSE enterprise. Major decisions are made by the members once a year at a General Assembly. Not only is there no price attached to any specific vegetable or a share. The aim is to provide good food to every member, regardless of his/her financial possibilities. Therefore everyone can decide how much their individual financial contribution can be. The total amount of financial contributions of the entire community must obviously be sufficient to cover all the expenses and overheads. Members also contribute through the work they do on a voluntary basis: taking turns at the stand every Friday, in the fields or in working groups. The land is partially owned by a foundation that was created precisely for one good reason: to provide land for sustainable agriculture and for CSAs like GeLa Ochsenherz in order to ensure long-term perspective and tenure.



Photo: Gela Ochsenherz

## CUKETA

The Civic association Cuketa (Slovak term for Zucchini) is based in the Slovak town of Nitra. Since its establishment in 2017 it has launched many projects. One of them is Community Supported Agriculture; there is also a project of public-open community permaculture garden. The localized food production has many benefits, it lowers the carbon footprint. "People of different mindsets and ages come together and help and inspire each other. For example, they share the seeds and prepare pickles, herbal oils and ointments together," said Eliška, one of the founders of Cuketa.

The association also organizes educational projects. In addition to various workshops for adults, a project called Moruša-čerešňová (Cherry-mulberry) is focused on childrens' education. "We have a community education centre, with a community kindergarten and also one group for older children. Children don't follow a regular curriculum where all subjects are taught separately. The subjects overlap because everything is linked. The holistic approach aims to train future generations who will be able to maintain sustainable life in connection with nature."

In addition, Cuketa organizes festivals, including Veganfest, promoting vegan values and also an annual community garden festival, with a different theme each year.<sup>7</sup>

## THE GLOBAL MOVEMENT

The possibility of ordinary people to change the course of history has always come with the ability to communicate, cooperate and organize. Many major breakthroughs of humanity against hierarchical, oppressive and exploitative paradigms have occurred when people have formed big movements, such as the movement for the womens' rights, or for the civil rights movement in the USA. Currently there is still a lot for which to fight. Evidently there are many movements nowadays living and struggling for a better world, such as movement for Climate Justice, Food Sovereignty, Solidarity Economy, peace, animal rights, queer rights and many more.

---

<sup>7</sup> Green communities around Slovakia (2020) [online]. RTVS, 2020. <https://enrsi.rtvs.sk/articles/society/219488/green-communities-around-slovakia?fbclid=IwAR3lyuXxqvOmUgkZPFRnTu62WVo-at7xqRy--XkPeEnA3qs3NRIMdAyctdQ>





Photo: freethesoil.org

Some movements face repression and it might seem futile to fight those who hold the martingales of governments and corporations, those who do not hesitate to corrupt, manipulate and even use violence. If our movements are to succeed, they must cooperate both at local level and on a global scale, within the movement and in between different movements.

At global level the Food Sovereignty movement is represented by the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC). It is an autonomous and self-organized global platform to advance the Food Sovereignty agenda at the global and regional level. Among the organizations, participating in the IPC at the international level is La Via Campesina, which coined the concept of Food Sovereignty. It brings together more than 200 million small and medium-scale farmers, landless people, women farmers, indigenous peoples, migrants and agricultural workers from all around the world. La Via Campesina associates 182 organisations from 81 countries. For Europe, the umbrella organization representing the Food Sovereignty movement is the Nyéléni Europe. It also includes Urgenci, the global network of Community Supported Agriculture, Indigenous Peoples, fishers, pastoralists, women and youth representatives, so all food-producing and food-consuming constituencies are represented.

### **Further reading and resources:**

The International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC): <https://www.foodsovereignty.org/the-ipc/>

La Via Campesina – the international umbrella organization for the Food Sovereignty movement: <https://viacampesina.org/en/who-are-we/>

Nyeléni Europe – the European coordination Via Campesina: <https://www.eurovia.org/campaign/nyeleni/>

Urgenci – the international community supported agriculture network: <https://www.urgenci.net>

## SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGN FOR SEED DIVERSITY

In May 2013, the EU Commission published the draft for regulation of marketing and propagating the seed material. The writers' aim was to prioritize increased productivity and intensify industrialized, export-oriented agriculture. It threatened rare varieties of vegetables, grains and fruit as well as rare breeds of animals.

Seed diversity and agrobiodiversity must be fully legally recognized and free of any restrictions! So the campaign against the proposed law began. All over Europe about 900,000 people signed petitions. In Austria, the petition called "Freedom for Diversity" was signed by 500,000 people within a year. Thousands of people sent e-mails and self-selected seeds to members of the EU Parliament to express their wish for the protection of diversity. On 11 March 2014, the European Parliament rejected the proposed draft. Humans and nature need diversity. Especially in times of climate change, we need resilient plants that are able to adapt to extreme conditions.<sup>8</sup> The struggle continues essentially through the UN Convention on Biodiversity.

## SUCCESSFUL EVENTS: THE NYÉLÉNI FOOD SOVEREIGNTY FORUMS

The struggle for Food Sovereignty cannot be imagined without the sharing of knowledge, meetings and networking. The first Nyéléni Forum took place in Mali in 2007. It brought together global leaders and actors from all the different constituencies of the Food Sovereignty movement. The first Nyéléni Europe Forum took place in Krems in Austria in August 2011. The second was held in Cluj-Napoca in Romania in October 2016. Both events brought many hundreds of activists from across Europe together. Another good example at national level is the second Forum of Food Sovereignty that was held in Warsaw in January 2020. It was organized by Nyéléni Poland with the support of several other groups. It was a gathering of activists, scholars, farmers and educators to discuss Food Sovereignty in the world, with special attention paid to the Polish case.



Photo: Thomas Marek | thomasmarekphotography.com

---

<sup>8</sup> EU Seed Law ("Revision of the EU Law on the Marketing of Seeds and Plant Propagating Material") FAQ – frequently asked questions and answers from a diversity perspective (2015) [online]. ARCHE NOAH, 2020. [https://www.arche-noah.at/files/15-03-18\\_faq\\_en-1\\_iga\\_-\\_final.pdf](https://www.arche-noah.at/files/15-03-18_faq_en-1_iga_-_final.pdf)



## EASIEST WAYS TO BE PART OF FOOD SOVEREIGNTY MOVEMENT



*The world is big enough  
to satisfy everyone's needs,  
but will always be too small to  
satisfy everyone's greed.*

*Mahatma Gandhi*



Share your attitudes and achievements with the others. Let your ideals and deeds be an inspiration for the people around you!

Everyone can become part of the Food Sovereignty movement. Even a few herb plants in your window box counts. Besides fresh herbs for your meal you provide a tiny green resting place appreciated by every insect flying by your window in the concrete jungle. The mind-map below can help you think of many different ways that most of us can use to support and live the ideas of Food Sovereignty.

### **START AN URBAN (COMMUNITY) GARDEN!**

Although the majority of the global population live in cities, many of these people have not given up on gardening. The truth is, that even the city dwellers who have never had a garden before, are now looking for a spot to put their tiny urban garden. Among the numerous benefits of urban gardens are cooling down the overheated city, and the reconnection of people and the ecosystems of which we are part. It is not so complicated to start gardening, even for beginners. Combined efforts with your friends and neighbours can bring even more positive effects, so why not to start the garden in a community way!

One of the best ideas is to start (or join) a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), like GeLa Ochsenherz described above. Advice about how to start a CSA are in chapter 1: Starting Up.

#### **Further reading and resources:**

An interview full of good advice about initiating a community garden

[en.reset.org/act/how-to-start-your-own-urban-or-community-garden](https://en.reset.org/act/how-to-start-your-own-urban-or-community-garden)

A guide with basic information about starting an urban garden

[urbanorganicfarm.com/uncategorized/how-can-we-start/](https://urbanorganicfarm.com/uncategorized/how-can-we-start/)

### **START A FOOD CO-OPERATIVE!**

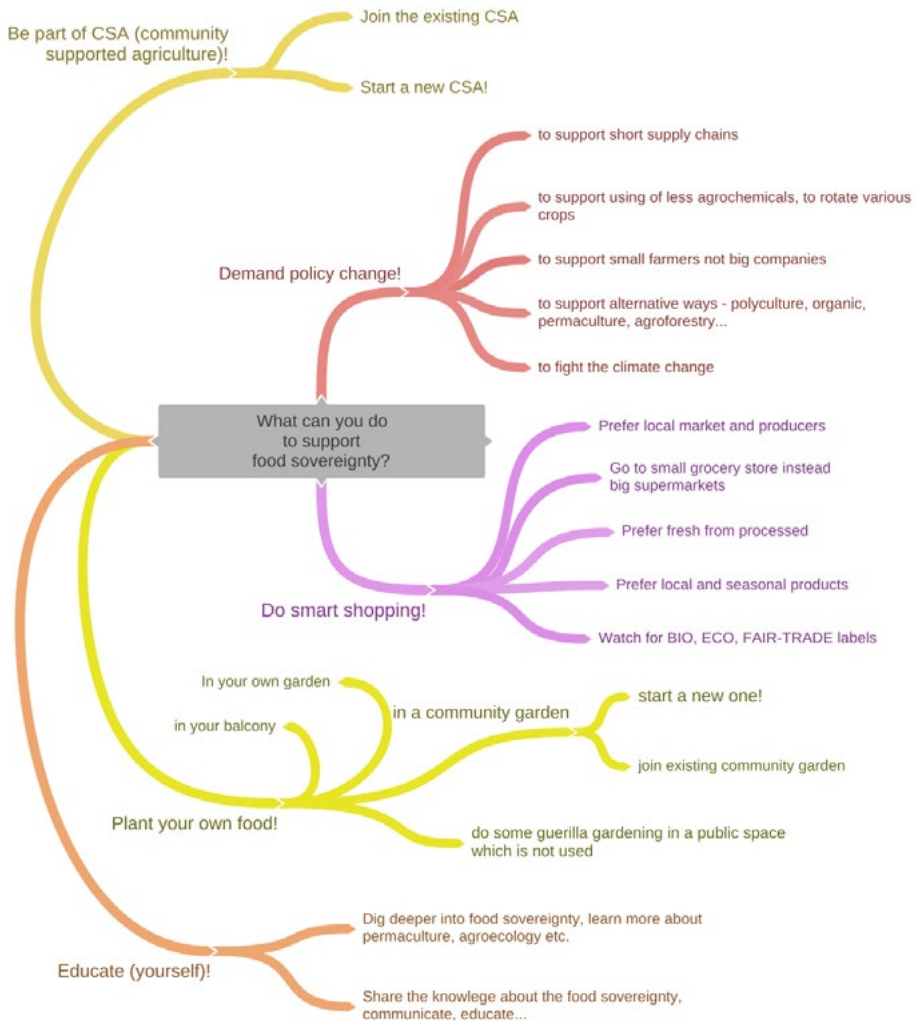
Do you feel that gardening is not for you? Then consider an idea of starting a food co-op! In addition to building a good community, a food co-op can provide its members a ready access to high quality food at lower prices compared with a grocery store. It will be you and your colleagues who will decide whether you will focus on local, organic, vegan, package-free food or a combination of

all these criteria. In chapter Community building you can find a good example of a food co-op – Dobrze.

**Further reading and resources:**

A step-by-step guide that'll give you advice on how to start

[www.wikihow.com/Start-a-Food-Co-op](http://www.wikihow.com/Start-a-Food-Co-op)





# ON THE PATH TOWARD TRANSFORMATION

It might be confusing that sometimes we talk about Social Economy, sometimes about Solidarity Economy and sometimes about Social Solidarity Economy. Why is that? Sounds quite similar, doesn't it? Are they all the same thing with different names depending on the heritage of some countries, or the result of various semantic approaches? For sure, there are many common points and values in those three concepts. Together they share the view that the pure essence of economy is not profit above everything else, and that the economy is not an isolated entity from the natural world or from the social dimension, that the value of economy should stay in the hands of those who created or produced that value as much as possible. We can think what social is and what solidarity is within an integrated term – Social Solidarity Economy. We can look at it as we are seeing twins – separate, but very connected and from the same origin. However, as very often, the devil is in the details.

We in the BUSSE project obviously put high emphasis on the solidarity part of our twins. We are standing by the position that in the 21st century we can't be satisfied with making the economy just a little bit better no matter the tools. Whether it is the green economy, corporate social responsibility or something else with pretty much the same short and shallow shiny touch. The problems of our civilization that we have continuously piled up for many decades and even centuries, calling us for something more than 10 easy and tiny steps for saving the planet or humans. The situation with economic inequality and injustice, environmental degradation, resource wars and climate change, poor democracy and manipulation in political business, the deterioration of human rights and tolerance, are so serious that it is not enough to be greener, more energy efficient, buy more eco-products and so on. It urges us, it calls us, it screams for substantial transformation. Here we promote and nourish, advocate and practice all those transformative collective actions or public policies work.

We are finishing this Booklet in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis which, as a consequence of our brutal invasion of Nature, reminds us also so brutally of the urgent needs for these transformative actions and policies for a more sustainable, just and solidarity-based world. It also makes us aware of the need for transformation in crucial areas of our society. Transformation with solidarity at its core.

This severe situation shouldn't discourage us, the uncertainty ahead of us, this enormous jig-saw puzzle of global problems that we need to solve and connect its isolated and dispersed pieces in a clear and admirable picture. Actually, we can see it as a mature person standing in front of its challenges and things that need to be done – not standing aside. This also means that we will not be

satisfied with crumbs and cosmetic plastering of the economy and democracy. We shouldn't be scared, because if we are active at this critical time, it means we care, we are alive.

In this Booklet we have presented some of ways in which Social Solidarity economy is active and alive already here and now, how people all over Europe are actively using these transformative practices and policies to share and spread solidarity and sustainability.

You can also see that the Booklet has devoted a lot of space to concrete examples, real life stories, inspiring case studies. That is our message. SSE is not just a theory or wishful thinking. SSE is a tool to transform our imagination into our real life and succeed.

This Booklet aims to help adult learners to become more aware, more informed and educated, closer to Social Solidarity Economy and we hope that we have made several steps further in this direction. We also invite you to not stop here but to contact our organizations that are partners in this project. We need many fellow companions on this transformation journey.

## **EKUMENICKÁ AKADEMIE (CZ)**

Ekumenická akademie/Ecumenical Academy (EA) is an NGO established in 1996 in the Czech Republic and our vision is a socially just, sustainable and tolerant society.

EA supports alternative forms of economical democracy, such as Social Solidarity Economy (SSE), Fair Trade, co-operatives. EA has more than 20 years of experience in informal education, co-operation with universities, campaigning on responsible consumption and alternative economic models and creating good practice examples of SSE.

EA has been working on promoting and practicing SSE since 2004 at national and international level. It was an initiator of Fair Trade movement in the Czech Republic, has run a Fair Trade shop for 10 years and in 2013 co-established Fair & Bio coffee Roasters.

More info: [www.ekumakad.cz](http://www.ekumakad.cz)



## **“DOBZRZE” FOOD CO-OPERATIVE (PL)**

For more than 7 years the “Dobrze” Food Co-operative has been running community-based shops with organic food in Warsaw. It’s experience presents a successful example on how a grass-roots community can create an inclusive, socially and environmentally responsible economic model. The goal of “Dobrze” Food Co-op is to support a system of food production and distribution that fulfils the needs of consumers and producers and takes care of our environment. It is driven by the belief that direct co-operation between consumers and producers contributes to strengthening active citizenship and creates a fair economy, beneficial for all involved parties.

The Co-op shops are the joint property of its members who govern it according to international co-operative principles. Currently, the cooperative has almost 600 members and more than 1000 clients, employs 14 people and co-operates with around 20 small-scale farms throughout the whole season.

More info: [www.dobrze.waw.pl](http://www.dobrze.waw.pl)

## **UTOPIA (SK)**

Utopia is a civic association founded in 2010 to support deepening of democratic processes in society, building citizens’ participation and promoting socially inclusive and environmentally friendly policies. The main mission of Utopia is to advance, create and implement social innovations leading to alleviation of poverty and social exclusion and to fostering of democratic co-operation, community development and environmental sustainability. It creates space for people’s participation in various decision-making processes, e.g. through participatory budgeting. Utopia supports the development of SSE through research, analyses and organisation of public events on this topic and through transnational co-operation and networking. It has been mapping the situation of SSE and co-operatives in Slovakia and in the Visegrad countries. It supports grassroots activities aimed at fighting poverty and social exclusion in people’s daily lives.

More info: [www.utopia.sk](http://www.utopia.sk)

## **CATHOLIC SOCIAL ACADEMY OF AUSTRIA (AT)**

The ksoe (Catholic Social Academy of Austria) provides adult education for a socio-ecological transformation in the areas of alternative/solidarity economy, leadership and participation and social justice. All research and practical work is carried out on the basis of Catholic Social Teaching, from an ecumenical and feminist perspective, oriented to humanist, social and appropriate structures, fair distribution and participation of everyone.

Participation and empowerment are key words for ksoe work and it encourages people to authentically and responsibly seize power to shape the future in organizations and elsewhere. The ksoe also support the development of an open culture of dialogue and promote the implementation of participatory structures and processes in organizations and enterprises – in times of strategic, structural and/or cultural change.

More info: [www.ksoe.at](http://www.ksoe.at)

## **SOLIDARITY ECONOMY EUROPE RIPESS (EU)**

RIPESS is the European umbrella network of the Social Solidarity Economy (SSE) organizations (part of the RIPESS intercontinental network), bringing together 37 national, sectoral and inter-sectoral networks in 15 EU countries (thus hundreds of non profit entities and SSE enterprises). It aims at sharing best practices and engaging in joint actions that can expand and enhance the visibility of the Social Solidarity Economy. The network gathers thousands of SSE stakeholders and organizations at European level, facilitating network intercooperation, awareness raising, peer-training and education and joint advocacy, contributing to legal frameworks and public policies.

More info: [www.ripest.eu/en](http://www.ripest.eu/en)



**Building Up Social Solidarity Economy (BUSSE)** is an Erasmus+ project that focuses on disseminating Social Solidarity Economy (SSE) know-how and practices in Central and Eastern Europe. This booklet has been designed to accompany the Building Up Social Solidarity Economy educational training.

This concise and easy-to-read booklet is based on the training. It highlights some of the key aspects of the training and resources on SSE, and makes it accessible to a wider audience. The four main chapters cover the following topics:

- 1. Starting up**
- 2. Community building**
- 3. Co-operatives**
- 4. Food Sovereignty**

We hope you enjoy reading, learning about and using the information, skills and tips for your community endeavours and transformative projects!