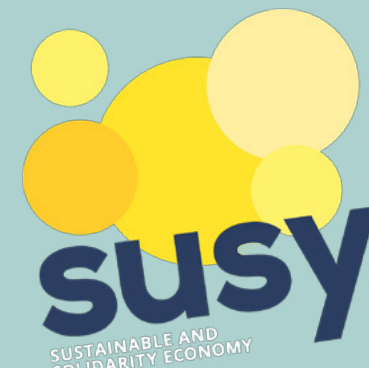
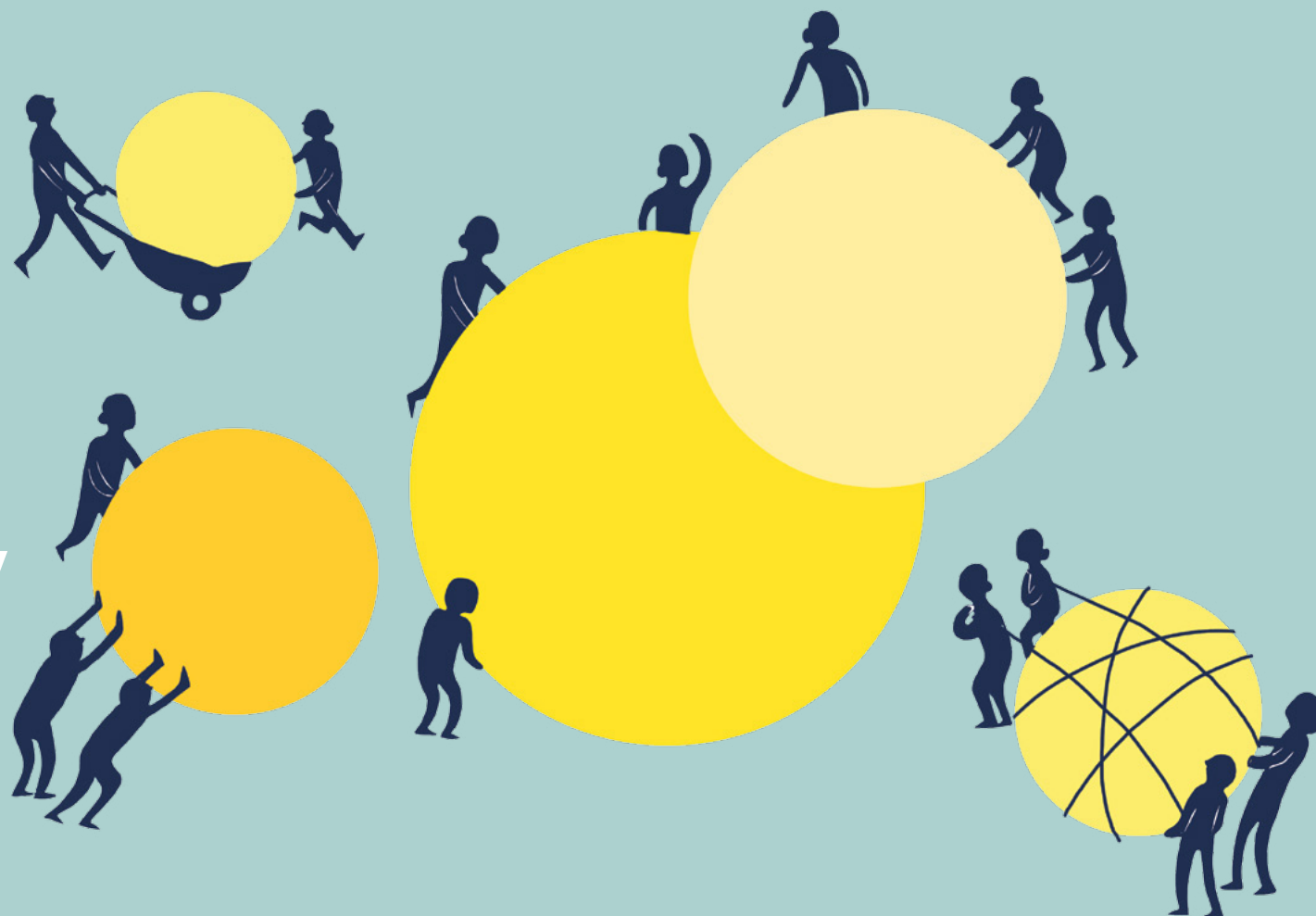


# Final analysis of the SSEDAS research



## Transformative economy:

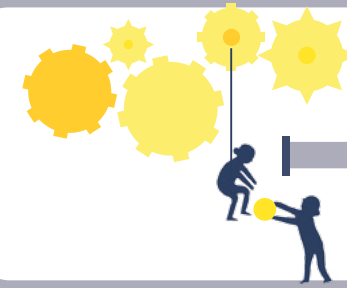
Challenges and limits  
of the Social and Solidarity  
Economy (SSE) in 55  
territories in Europe  
and in the World



## What Social and Solidarity Economy is

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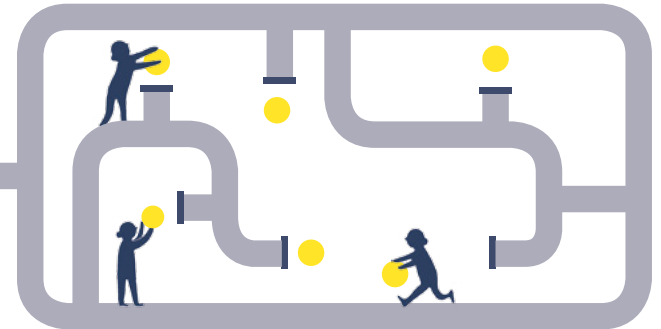
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## SSEDAS: the research activity and the network

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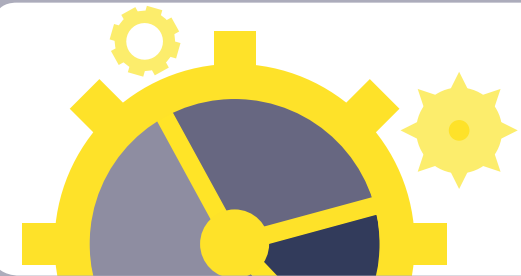
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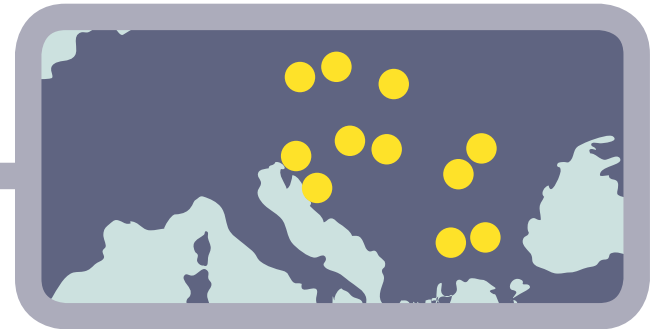


Core research

## Eastern Europe

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Core research

## World area

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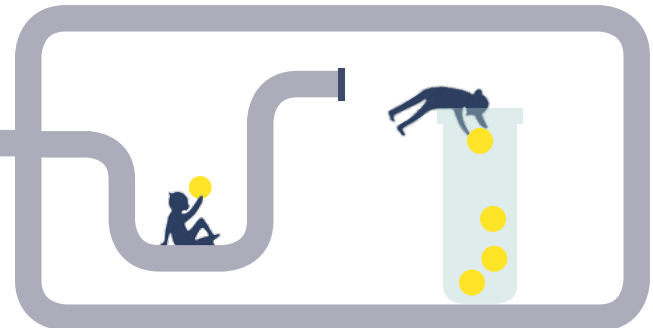


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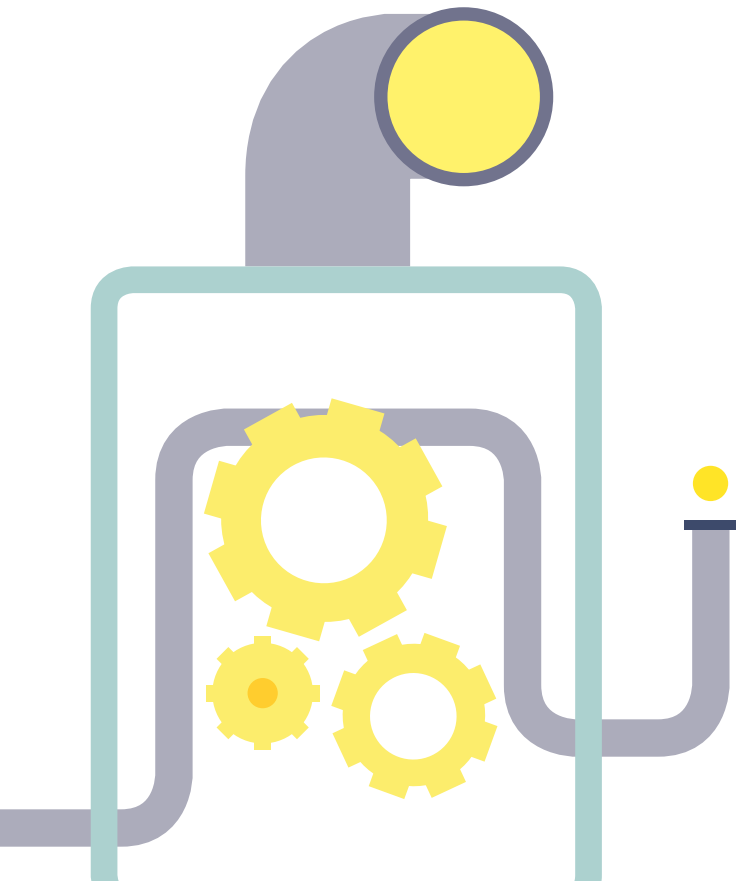
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# Core Research

## Northern and Central Europe

SSE context in the good practices' Countries, Data analysis, Sectors, Participation, Impact, Turnover Solutions against the economic crisis, South-North exchanges.

- **Critical aspects:** Defining SSE, Communication and advocacy, Strategic economic policies.

- **Points of interest:** Innovative agriculture, New urban perspectives, Reversing industrial food processing damages, Food Policies, Sustainability of the activities, Self-organized communities, Fair and solidarity trade and international food sovereignty rights, International solidarity funding (development and environmental protection projects).

## Mediterranean Area

SSE context in the good practices' Countries, Data analysis, Sectors, Participation, Impact, Turnover, Solutions against the economic crisis, South-North exchanges.

- **Critical aspects:** Defining SSE, Communication and advocacy, Strategic economic policies, Critic relationships with the Global South.

- **Points of interest:** Innovative agriculture, Sustainability of the activities, Reducing, reusing, and recycling can help communities, Innovative social inclusion initiatives Networking in action: districts and clusters.

## Eastern Europe

SSE context in the good practices' Countries, Data analysis, Sectors, Participation, Impact, Turnover Solutions against the economic crisis, South-North exchanges.

- **Critical aspects:** Defining SSE, Communication and advocacy, Strategic economic policies.

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- **Points of interest:** Innovative and eco-friendly productive activities, Reducing, reusing, and recycling can help communities, Sustainability of the activities, Fair and solidarity trade and social inclusion

## World area

SSE context in the good practices' Countries, Data analysis, Sectors, Participation, Impact, Turnover Solutions against the economic crisis, South-North exchanges

- **Critical aspects:** Defining SSE, Communication and advocacy, Visions and economic strategies

- **Points of interest:** Policies that support food sovereignty and agro ecological practices, To reduce, reuse, and recycle can help communities and fight poverty, Sustainability of the activities, Self- managed and collectively owned initiatives, Gender equality, Local markets, Preserving heritages and cultures, Fair and solidarity trade and international food sovereignty rights

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## Conclusions

- Emerging models that work: Innovative agriculture, Energy sustainability, Reducing, reusing and, recycling, Self-managed communities, Governance and quality of employment, Ethical finance Innovative social inclusion, Networking in action: districts and clusters, Gender equality, Local market Preserving heritages and cultures.

- Challenges for the near future  
- SSE and a shared vision for all.

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## List of acronyms

- CBO = Community-based Organization
- CSA = Community-supported Agriculture
- CSO = Civil Society Organization
- CSR = Corporate Social Responsibility
- NGO = Non-governmental Organization
- SDGs = Sustainable Development Goals
- SPG = Solidarity Purchasing Group
- SME = Small and Medium Enterprise
- SSE = Social and Solidarity Economy

# Foreword

## What Social and Solidarity Economy is

According to RIPESS, the most relevant network of SSE globally, “Social and Solidarity Economy is a movement that seeks to change the whole social and economic system and puts forth a different paradigm of development that upholds Solidarity Economy principles. The SSE is a dynamic of reciprocity and solidarity which links individual interests with the collective ones”. According to one of its founders, Luis Razeto, “the main principle or foundation of solidarity economics states that the introduction of quantitatively and qualitatively superior levels of solidarity in economic activities, organizations and institutions, encompassing businesses, markets and public policies, increases both micro- and macroeconomic efficiency in addition to generating an array of social and cultural benefits that contribute to the development of the whole society”<sup>1</sup>.

“The term social and solidarity economy is increasingly being used to refer to a broad range of organizations that are distinguished from conventional for-profit enterprise, entrepreneurship and informal economy by two core features. First, they have explicit economic AND social (and often environmental) objectives. Second, they involve varying forms of co-operative, associative and solidarity relations. They include, for example, cooperatives, mutual associations, NGOs engaged in income generating activities, women’s self-help groups, community forestry and other organizations, associations of informal sector workers, social enterprise and Fair Trade organizations and networks”<sup>2</sup>. Signs of upscaling are noticeable.

As charted in a 2011 ILO report, “SSE appears to be moving beyond its niche, peripheral, project or community-level status, and becoming more significant in terms of macro-economic, commercial and social-economic indicators: in Europe, 2 million SSE organizations represent about 10% of all companies; in India, over 30 million people (mainly women) are organized in over 2.2 million self-help groups; and the country’s largest food marketing corporation, the cooperative organization Amul, has 3.1 million producer members and an annual revenue of \$2.5 billion; in Nepal, 5 million forest users are organized in the

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1 [www.luisrazeto.net/content/what-solidarity-economics](http://www.luisrazeto.net/content/what-solidarity-economics)

2 [www.unrisd.org/](http://www.unrisd.org/)

country's largest CBO; the global Fair Trade market has grown to €4.9 billion (\$6.4 billion) and involves some 1.2 million workers and farmers producing certified products; Mutual benefit societies provide health and social protection services to 170 million people worldwide<sup>3</sup>.

The concept of solidarity intended as active reciprocity is strategic to give a positive answer to EU concerns on the growing power of emerging Countries in the Global policies scenario. In the Communication "A decent life for all"<sup>4</sup> the EU reports that "while developed and emerging economies account for most of global GDP, the latter have now become the key drivers of global growth and already have a significant impact on the world economy. Trends suggest that the balance is expected to shift further; by 2025, global economic growth should predominantly be generated in emerging economies, with six countries expected to collectively account for more than half of all global growth". But the same document also highlights that "at the same time, inequalities within countries have increased in most parts of the world. Most the poor now live in middle income countries, despite their fast growth. Achieving poverty eradication in such countries appears to be one of the major challenges. However, longer term projections indicate that by 2050 the locus of poverty might again be concentrated in the poorest and most fragile countries".

**"The solidarity economy process seeks to achieve:**

- Collective self-organizing to sustain life (human and non-human);
- Democratic coordination of economic and social enterprises;
- Self-managed enterprises;
- Worker and collective ownership;
- Participatory civic and social action;
- Ongoing education and learning for progress;
- Social transformation centered on human need and the environment"<sup>5</sup>.

"The solidarity economy process has the potential to become the central means for meeting the requirements for society and nature to sustain themselves. The state and market can potentially be subordinated to the logic of the solidarity economy.

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3 [www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_emp/---emp\\_ent/---coop/documents/instructionalmaterial/wcms\\_166301.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_ent/---coop/documents/instructionalmaterial/wcms_166301.pdf)

4 [europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-13-143\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-13-143_en.htm)

5 [womin.org.za/](http://womin.org.za/)

This is crucial vision for activism, movement building and all activities that inform the solidarity economy process"<sup>6</sup>.

The SSEDAS research analyses global interdependences from many different points of view, highlighting how extreme poverty and bad environmental management may be due to a wrong or bad implementation of European policies, and how they might be influenced by direct or indirect European citizens' behaviours. Once again, it is possible to point out to European citizens a positive model, such as SSE, that is applicable both to the Global South and Europe and that allows citizens to undertake actions to change their behaviours contributing to reach poverty eradication and sustainable development. A special emphasis will be placed upon the necessity to enhance citizens understanding on global common goods and common challenges.

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6 [www.populareducation.co.za/](http://www.populareducation.co.za/)

# SSEDAS: the research activity and the network

## Methodology of the research

The specific objective of the project “Social and Solidarity Economy as Development Approach for Sustainability in EYD 2015 and beyond” (SSEDAS), sustained by the European Union, is to enhance the competences of Development Networks and Social and Solidarity Economy Networks in **55** territories (46 in Europe and 9 in the rest of the world) concerning the role that SSE can play in the global fight against poverty and to promote a sustainable way of living. One of the tools used to reach this objective has been the Research activity, that allowed to identify and analyze significant practices of SSE within the concerned territories, the ones that promote innovation and that are oriented towards the building of an alternative development model with respect to the dominant one.

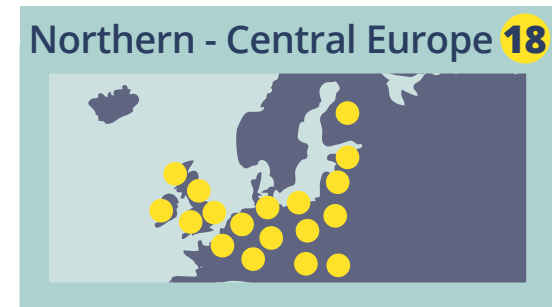
Thanks to this activity it was possible to contribute to:

- make the different experiences come to light, with the specific features of their context;
- compare experiences of SSE in Europe and in other continents, allowing for an exchange of models, visions and practices;
- reduce the gap between the different planning and designs of the subjects that are present in the territories involved such as NGOs, SSEs, cooperatives, social enterprises, communities and informal networks, while creating additional forms of interconnection and possible collaborations;
- foster a better knowledge among the SSE actors both in the North and the South of the world to analyse their experiences horizontally (within their district, among the different types of approaches) and in a cross-cutting way (comparing good practices in the North and the South of the world);
- bridge the gap between development cooperation and SSE, to highlight a common global framework for alternative economic choices;
- enhance the competences of the SSE actors so as to create a dynamic of reciprocity and solidarity which links individual interests with the collective ones.

The research has been carried out in **32** countries, **23** of which are EU Member States (46 territories) and 9 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, as follows:

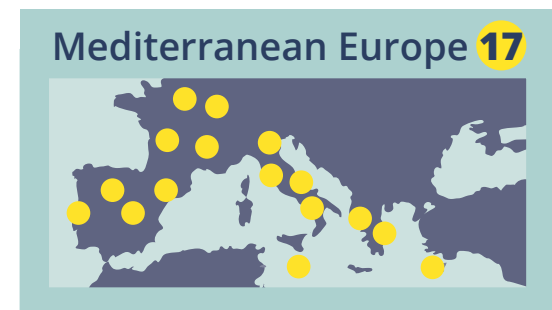
## Northern Europe and Central Europe

4 territories in the UK: North East, North West, South East and Greater London; 4 in Germany: North Rhine-Westfalia, Bavaria, Berlin and Hamburg; 2 in Austria: East and West; 2 in Poland: South-West region of Poland Central and Southern region in Poland; 1 territory in Latvia; 1 territory in Ireland; 1 territory in Finland; 1 territory in Belgium; 1 territory in Estonia.



## Mediterranean Europe

4 territories in Italy: Tuscany, Marche, Puglia e Emilia Romagna; 4 territories in France: -Midi- Pyrenees, Aquitaine, Languedoc Roussillon and Paris; 3 territories in Spain: Valencian Region, Aragon Region, Andalucía; 2 territories in Portugal: Lisbon Region and Alentejo Region; 2 territories in Greece: Athens and Thessaloniki; 1 territory in Cyprus; 1 territory in Malta.





## Eastern Europe

2 territories in Hungary: Baranaya County and Pest County; 2 territories in Bulgaria: North Central Region and South Western Region; 2 territories in the Czech Republic: Prague and Central Bohemia; 2 territories in Romania: South Muntenian and Bucharest-Ilovo; 1 territory in Slovakia; 1 territory in Croatia; 1 territory in Slovenia.



## World area

Latin America: Brazil, Bolivia, Uruguay; Africa: Tunisia, Mauritius, Mozambique; Asia: India, Malaysia, Palestine.



## Some facts and figures

**The SSEDas research is surely among the most relevant researches ever realized on the topic of Social and Solidarity Economy. Here are some figures:**

- **Several partners put in contact and collaborating:**
  - COSPE and Fairwatch (Italy)
  - Südwind (Austria)
  - INKOTA (Germany)
  - Deša Dubrovnik (Croatia)
  - KOPIN (Malta)
  - CERAI (Spain)
  - Polish Fair Trade Coalition (Poland)
  - Ekumenicka Akademie Praha Europe (Czech Republic)
  - Fair Trade Hellas (Greece)
  - NGO Mondo (Estonia)
  - Balkan Institute for Labour e Social Policy (Bulgaria)
  - CARDET (Cyprus)
  - Pro Ethical Trade Finland (Finland)
  - Ressources Humaines sans Frontières (France)
  - The Co-operative College e Think Global (United Kingdom)
  - Cromo Foundation and Foundation for Development of Democratic Rights DemNet (Hungary)
  - Instituto Marquês de Valle Flôr (Portugal)
  - Terra Mileniul III Foundation (Romania)
  - Slovak Centre for Communication e Development (Slovakia)
  - Peace Institute – Institute for Contemporary Social e Political Studies (Slovenia)
  - Action pour le Développement Asbl – SOS Faim (Belgium)
  - Green Liberty (Latvia)
  - Waterford One World Centre (Ireland)

- **80 researchers involved by the partners;**
- **More than 1100 practices mapped;**
- **More than 550 interviews carried out, involving NGOs networks, districts and SSE realities, institutions, local authorities, Members of parliament, CBOs and volunteers;**
- **More than 100 representatives from local authorities involved**
- **55 videos of significant practices from the territories produced**

The research activity has realized a thorough analysis, thanks to the shared methodology developed in 4 phases:

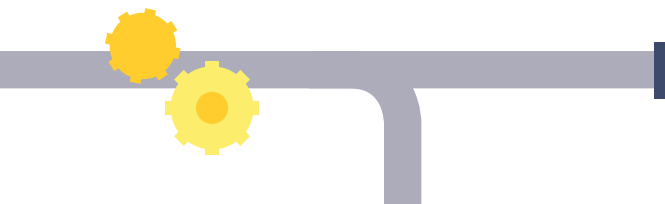
1. Mapping of at least 20 stakeholders for each territory;
2. Identification of 5 key stakeholders from different sectors (activists, volunteers, NGO operators, consumers, local or national authorities, universities, etc.) interviewed for a context analysis and for inputs and useful indications for the selection of the good practice in the territory;
3. After the selection of the good practice, 5 additional interviews carried out to actors that are involved in the practice (members, associates or stakeholders) to deepen the contribution of the chosen experience in the context of the research;
4. Draft of the final report with an in-depth analysis of the good practices, or better significant experiences that are more capable of contributing to the project's objectives.

## Presenting the research

### Finding a shared definition

A first aspect of great importance is the definitions adopted by the researchers at work in the 55 territories examined. Local situations, both regarding the sources of data and information, both the content of the numerous good practices identified and selected, have suggested definitions that do not always coincide for same practices. The notion of solidarity economy, accurate in European official documents, turned out to be understood, in most cases, as social economy or cooperative economy. There's no shortage of experiences to report in this area, however, within the institutions and the laws and regulations of the sector, prevails a broader vision that highlights the social values that include those of solidarity. Moreover, in several territories, when there were legal-institutional contexts clearly defined, it was preferred to adopt a broad definition that would cover all the emerging experiences, rather than to stick to a more specific one which might not be correctly perceived at the local level.

The quality of the experiences, almost always very high, can provide the necessary background information for a comparison between the experiences first and then between the territories. It can be assumed that in the research the most widely accepted definition has been that of "social economy", best described by the practices analysed in Northern and Eastern European countries, which in some cases undoubtedly can claim a longer period of legal regulation, as, for instance, in the case of the United Kingdom. The concept of SSE, with an enhanced social focus and greater autonomy from the given models emerged more clearly in some countries in the Mediterranean Area, especially in France, Italy and Spain. In the rest of the world, which includes three Latin American countries (where historically, in the early 70s, the earliest experiences of an economy geared to solidarity principles have spread) it can be seen that in the most recent period, while the European paradigm has been formalized by attempts to create organizational forms of SSE (cooperatives, mutuals, associations), the Latin America one focused more on the substantial inclusion of different actors in the economy. The solidarity economy, in this perspective, is an alternative form of economy, in theory and in practices strongly associated with social and economic change. All the realities analysed in the first phase of the research and the ones that have been selected as good practices fall within one of the three main sectors included in the RIPESS definition of SSE. In detail, these are three different approaches that share several features and that have a social role whose importance has long been underrated, especially with respect to job creation in an historical era in which dominant systems show a scarce ability to multiply long-lasting employment possibilities.



## A. Social economy:

The social economy is commonly understood as a “third sector” of the economy, complementing the “first sector” (private/profit-oriented) and the “second sector” (public/planned). The third sector includes cooperatives, mutuals, associations, and foundations (CMAFs). These entities are collectively organized and oriented around social aims that are prioritized above profits, or return to shareholders. The primary concern of CMAFs, as societies of people, is not to maximize profits, but to achieve social goals (which does not exclude making a profit, which is necessary for reinvestment). Some consider the social economy to be the third leg of capitalism, along with the public and the private sector. Thus, advocates of the social economy push for it to be accorded the same legitimacy as the public and private sectors, with a corresponding level of support in public resources and policy. Others, on the more radical end of the spectrum, view the social economy as a stepping stone towards a more fundamental transformation of the economic system.

## B. Solidarity economy:

The solidarity economy seeks to change the whole social and economic system and puts forth a different paradigm of development that upholds solidarity economy principles. It pursues the transformation of the neoliberal capitalist economic system from one that gives primacy to maximizing private profit and blind growth, to one that puts people and planet at its core. As an alternative economic system, the solidarity economy thus includes all three sectors – private, public and the third sector. The solidarity economy seeks to re-orient and harness the state, policies, trade, production, distribution, consumption, investment, money and finance, and ownership structures towards serving the welfare of people and the environment. What distinguishes the solidarity economy movement from many other social change and revolutionary movements of the past, is that it is pluralist in its approach - eschewing rigid blueprints and the belief in a single, correct path. The solidarity economy also values and builds on concrete practices, many of which are quite old. The solidarity economy, rather than seeking to create utopia out of thin air and theory, recognizes that there currently exists a concrete utopia, a utopia in action. It is rooted in the practices of participatory democracy and promotes a new vision of the economy, an economy that puts people at the center of the system and values the links rather than the goods. Thus, the solidarity economy explicitly has a systemic, transformative, post-capitalist agenda. The social economy, on the other hand, refers to a sector of the economy that may or may not be part of a transformative, post capitalist agenda, depending on whom you're talking to.

## C. Social enterprise:

A comparison of the definition of social enterprise used by social enterprise associations in the UK, the US, Europe and Canada, shows that they have the following features in common: 1) the enterprise serves a social aim such as fighting poverty or social exclusion 2) it primarily generates income based on the sale of goods and services rather than depending on grant funding and 3) profits are reinvested in the social mission rather than maximizing value for stockholders. Where the definitions differ is in terms of ownership and control. The stockholder form vests control with owner(s), whether it is an individual or a group investors that purchased shares in the enterprise. In this case, control is accorded to capital – the amount of money that has been invested in the enterprise. The stakeholder form vests control in some collective of those that have an invested interest or stake – not only a monetary one – in the enterprise. This could include the workers, the community, the beneficiaries, or a non-profit organization. Whereas the UK and US associations include both the stockholder and stakeholder forms of ownership/control, the European and Canadian associations restrict their definition to include only the stakeholder form<sup>7</sup>.

## Most present economic sectors

The 55 practices selected deal with different sectors or areas of competence of SSE. The main reference sectors are the following: the agricultural and organic chain, Fair Trade, critical consumption, ethical finance, responsible tourism, reuse and recycling, renewable energy, eco-friendly craftsmanship, local welfare services, non-monetary exchange systems, alternative communication services, free software. There are productive sectors (of goods and services), cultural activities and campaigning. This categorization is clearly limited and synthetic, given that there are practices that implement activities in several of these fields and that there are systemic/district practices or multisector networks that don't fit such classification because they work on processes of integration and reorganization, focusing more on what is produced and exchanged rather than on the processes.

The economic and social sectors where the good practices operate widely vary between the different analysed countries, sometimes for historical or cultural reasons. The following guidance is therefore to be understood as a set of comprehensive sectors in which the practices operate, while the chapters on the practices are suitable to be consulted by different groups for further analysis in analytical or educational terms. The majority of the analysed entities operates

in the field of agricultural and food production activities (34 of 55), and includes small-scale food processing activities, such as bread ovens or dining experiences, with mechanisms of products distribution that follow socially relevant purposes rather than inputs from the market. With respect to the adopted methods of production a strong presence of organic farming is noticeable. The next four fields - Fair Trade, critical consumption, sustainable lifestyles and reuse, recycling and redistribution - (which comprise from 11 to 16 reality each) are instead characterized by a special attention devoted to environmental sustainability. As can be seen below, it would be very difficult to compare the different sectors using traditional parameters (such as turnover or the produced quantities or how much is annually distributed) as the logic of social solidarity is prevalent in determining the activities executed within every experience.

Among the other sectors, there is a good percentage of practices of Fair Trade, several experiences that deal with **critical consumption** and that promote more **sustainable lifestyles** while there are also various practices that work in the field of **reuse and recycling**.

### The principle of participation

One of the important keys to test SSE effectiveness and specificity is to compare the dimension of participation in the analysed 55 experiences. The calculation is not easy, but the final figures are quite impressive. In total more than 13,000 people involved in different ways have been registered, while more than 1,500 people are directly or indirectly employed by the selected entities. However, this method of calculation tends to conceal a much more complex reality with respect to quantitative dimensions. In fact, it would be appropriate to relate the weight of each reality to the population of the territory or of the Country in which the good practice operates, as the degree of impact on the external environment may be quite different, also depending on whether the actors act in a peripheral or marginal area of the country or operate in urban areas. Moreover, elements such as the ability to create jobs may be important if the initiative was born in an area with high unemployment or developed in an area with few social liveliness. In any case, many of the initiatives are characterized by the ability to expand or multiply in relation to the deepest needs of social solidarity.

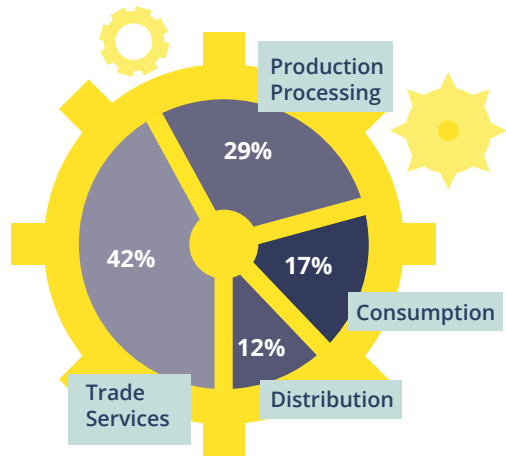
Finally, it is relevant to highlight the presence of some experiences, such as the organization Mozambique National Peasant Union, which gathers more than 2,500 cooperatives or farmers' associations, whose membership includes over 100,000 farmers, as well as organizations such as Shared Interest that has 9000 supporting members. Similar considerations apply to the estimates relating to funds received or used in the activities. A simple sum of the figures available for

all 55 territories leads to rather substantial figure estimated of 90 million EUR, but it is very important to make the necessary distinctions between initiatives such as Shared Interest declaring a turnover of 42,5 million EUR, Manchester Home Care which indicates a gross revenue of 14,2 million EUR and other entities that provide figures of several million a year. In fact, a more significant figure to take into consideration is the average turnover of all the experiences, which amounts to about 300,000 EUR.



## Productive functions and legal forms of the organizations

When analysing the traditional economic functions carried out by the selected practices, one can notice a preponderance of the functions related to trade and services (42%), subsequently the functions of production and processing (29%), consumption (17%), and distribution (12%).

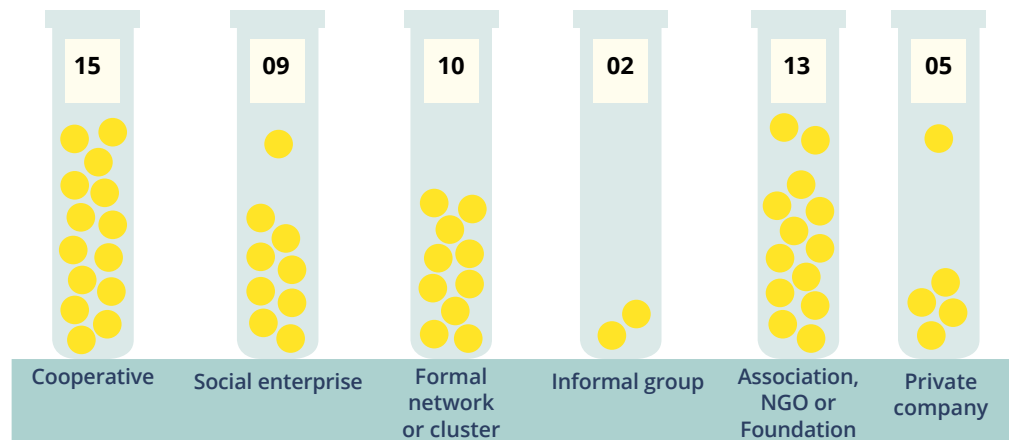


ECONOMI FUNCTIONS

With respect to the juridical form of these organizations, it is interesting to observe that the majority of the practices fall within one of four main categories: **Cooperatives** (15) or **Associations, NGOs or Foundations** (13), while to a lesser extent there are also **social enterprises** (9) and **private enterprises** (5).

In addition, there are also districts or networks (10 with different forms) and **two experiences** with no defined juridical form (informal groups).

JURIDICAL FORM

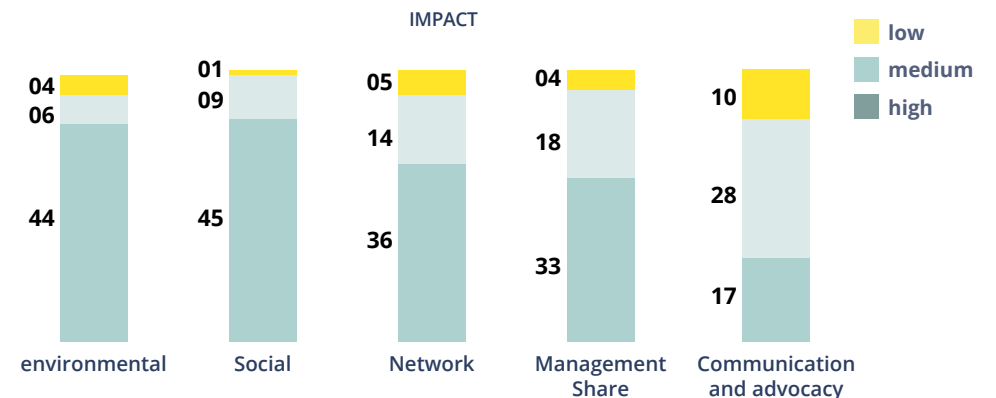


## The impact on the surroundings

In very general terms, it is quite clear that the analysed practices of SSE are oriented to achieve public policy objectives, to promote the relationships between different entities, to maintain an appropriate use of resources, to protect and respect the environment. here is a substantial homogeneity between the principles that in general inspire many experiences, even if they often use different words to describe or to define themselves, underlining some aspects rather than others. The most common terms used are cooperation, reciprocity, responsibility, subsidiarity, sustainability, and energy and environmental compatibility.

More specifically, we can observe the high value given to the **social and environmental dimension** in most of the analysed practices. Another noteworthy factor is the one relating to **self-management and participation** and to the ability to work in **networks** and to create relationships with other realities in the territory and beyond, which has been registered as positive in several analysed practices.

The weakest performances are observed in the **communication and advocacy** capacities of these entities. It may also be noted that in many situations the analysed experiences consider themselves as constantly changing reality which set up goals, trace paths and do not neglect any effort to achieve the identified purpose for their work. So many times, it is important to evaluate the achieved results in the ongoing transformation and the existing potential, rather than describing the situation at the time of the research realization. The above mentioned indications are represented in the following graph, which shows the impact of some values within the practices.



## SSE a positive factor in economic crisis

Throughout the process of the research it was often mentioned that many of the identified experiences are relevant players in tackling the social harm caused by the global economic crisis. Of course, their size of the initiatives is often limited, which doesn't allow at this stage to consider them a crucial factor in the solution or the exit from the crisis. The SSE clearly appears as the bearer of values and methods that significantly contrast, particularly in Western countries and in those that depend on them for exports, the strategies inspired by the austerity, which as the first result exert braking action towards new jobs. Beyond its size, therefore, the SSE plays a particularly valuable role and direction, to tackle the global economic, financial and environmental crisis. In many countries, regardless of economic policy strategies adopted by governments, it has opened an important social space, that is, the ability to promote, encourage and support the initiatives and activities inspired by the principles of social economy and solidarity, which also in the short term can play a facilitating role and support for the population that suffers the negative consequences of the crisis. The experiences analysed all have this potential, whose effects have been already produced in recent years, and some examples are useful to substantiate the above statements.

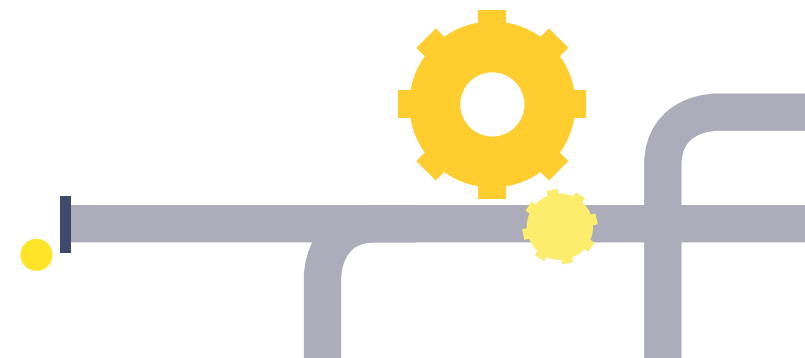
The practices of CSA in Austria, in Finland, Ireland and Germany are of special interest as they constitute emerging schemes oriented towards food sovereignty willing to show that it is possible to support income as well as quality of life for different people with small scale solutions at the local level. This is the main reason why they are rather important instruments to counteract the impacts caused by the ongoing systemic crisis. In the Mediterranean area as well, all the different form of SSE like organic farming, solidarity consumers' groups, renewable energy production, cooperatives, Fair Trade are growing, though slower than in the past. They are not exempt from the economic crisis and can be overwhelmed by it (especially if they mimic the competitive model), but they're much more vibrant. And the main lesson learned is that by networking together and cooperating in a more holistic way, the crisis can become a real opportunity to have more people engaging and taking part in the re-creation of a different economy, which responds to the needs of individuals and communities, and not to the greed of profit makers and exclusive private interests.

In Greece the organization **Solidarity for all**, for instance, is notable because is offering coordination and practical assistance to all kinds of initiatives, ranging from social clinics and pharmacies, to community kitchens and food distribution.

Solidarity for all is a 'child' of the crisis. It was formed to address the needs for interconnection, communication, facilitation and coordination of all the diverse structures, movements and initiatives that have sprung because of the crisis and its effects on the people of this country.

Workers in SSE enterprises have increased in the last 10 years from 11 million in 2002-2003 to 15 million, making up about 6,5 % of the working population of the EU. This number does not include all the informal ways and the mixed forms of SSE practices and initiatives (from self-production, to co- construction, to barter, social currencies, time banks, etc.). CSA groups, Solidarity Consumer and Producer Groups are multiplying in many forms: from a few hundred in the end of the 1990s and only in two-three countries, to tens of thousands in 2015. Another emerging issue that the SSE can help address is the growing number of migrants that migrate to or pass through European countries, often receiving poor assistance or support. An SSE practice promoted in Slovenia and called Skuhna or Slovenian World Cuisine is an innovative project of social enterprise, which involve migrants as well as refugees.

The idea is based on the connection between people around a basic need: food and nutrition. Also on the issue of migrants and refugees, an important role is played by the Bulgarian Food Bank Foundation. Together with its classic approach to ensure care and food support to migrants, it creates a link between the food industry and the organizations providing food support inside and outside the shelters for refugees. In 2014 over 3,480 refugees were assisted, including over 150 families housed in external addresses. In these examples we can see that the concrete contribution to a more human migration is definitely modest, but the forms in which it is handled can definitely be imitated by many of the government interventions in all receiving countries.



## North and South of the world facing globalization

The best experiences of SSE have very often close relations with the countries of the global South, even though not all areas record a large number of international cooperation activities. In the Northern Central area, 8 realities show a strong interest in international cooperation, while in the other geographical areas considered the attention devoted to exchanges with the global South is less present (3 practices in the Mediterranean area, 3 in the World area and even fewer in Eastern Europe). Many of the ongoing projects are connected to Fair Trade activities, often associated with initiatives of "Global Education" and ethical consumption.

According to the World Fair Trade Organization, "Fair Trade is a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency and respect, that seeks greater equity in international trade. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions to, and securing the rights of, marginalised producers and workers – especially in the South. (...)

Fair Trade organisations (backed by consumers) are engaged actively in supporting producers, awareness raising and in campaigning for changes in the rules and practice of conventional international trade<sup>78</sup>. In addition to Fair Trade, there are the initiatives that fall in the realm of international cooperation for development. Some projects are being implemented by SSE organizations actually operating in Belgium, Austria, England and Germany in the North Central Europe; in Spain and France for the Mediterranean area; in the Czech Republic and Slovakia in the East Europe and finally in Mozambique, Bolivia in the rest of the world.

## Structural weaknesses

On the basis of further analysis carried out on the identified good experiences, common shortcomings have gradually emerged in several territories. Such "structural weaknesses" appear to have slowed or hindered the emergence and diffusion of the practices.

This part of the research and analysis is particularly important, not so much for the correctness and completeness of the whole project, but because a smart vision arising from the critical work done in the research can contribute to foster the launch and proliferation of SSE initiatives. In the texts presented by the researchers it is often reported that the initiatives struggle to carry out activities in the field of **communication and advocacy**; moreover, experiences of great interest have apparently paid little attention to the need to communicate

regularly and consistently and even at the national level some difficulties are encountered in obtaining satisfying results concerning the strengthening and proliferation of SSE practices. The degree of effectiveness of the initiatives in this field needs further efforts so as to achieve more adequate effects in a short span of time.

With respect with the **Northern area**, the public opinion remains insufficiently informed of opportunities created by social economy, largely because of overlooking the issue by public media and poor impact of conducted campaigns. Emerging social enterprises struggle to retain their presence on the market, while informational and educational activities are not sufficiently supported by public administration. As we have previously noted in qualitative figures on the impact of these experiences in different contexts, in fact these part of the activities that should be carried out in support of practical activities appear too limited and therefore still do not play a necessary role in promoting and multiplying even in the best experiences. Communication and advocacy activities carried out by some of the selected practices should be greatly enhanced in order for the logic of solidarity economy to grow enough to change the national economic outcome. In this field of activity, interaction between local authorities, universities and public organizations for SMEs and specific reality of SSE are critical.

Referring to the **Mediterranean area**, there are many ongoing initiatives in communication and advocacy implemented by some of the most active organizations so there is a marked improvement in public reaction such as the presence of some of these practices in newspapers or social media. However there is the need to involve a greater number of people and also in quite rapid times, since this area shows the same difficulties in the field of communication and advocacy that are registered in other areas of the research. And in the other two areas the situation seems to be even more negative. The second matter frequently mentioned is critically related to the economic policy strategies concerning SSE, also because in phases of expansion, all the activities that take place in these fields deserve to have some support from public authorities, or even to be considered as beneficiaries of economic policy measures, taking into account their social relevance.

On the other hand we cannot underestimate some risks: often governments tend to entrust to organizations engaged in social issues some of the tasks that should be undertaken by public structures; sometimes funding or incentives are accompanied by constraints or too bureaucratic controls; often public bodies try to get a return in terms of politics or publicity from activities that follow a completely different logic.

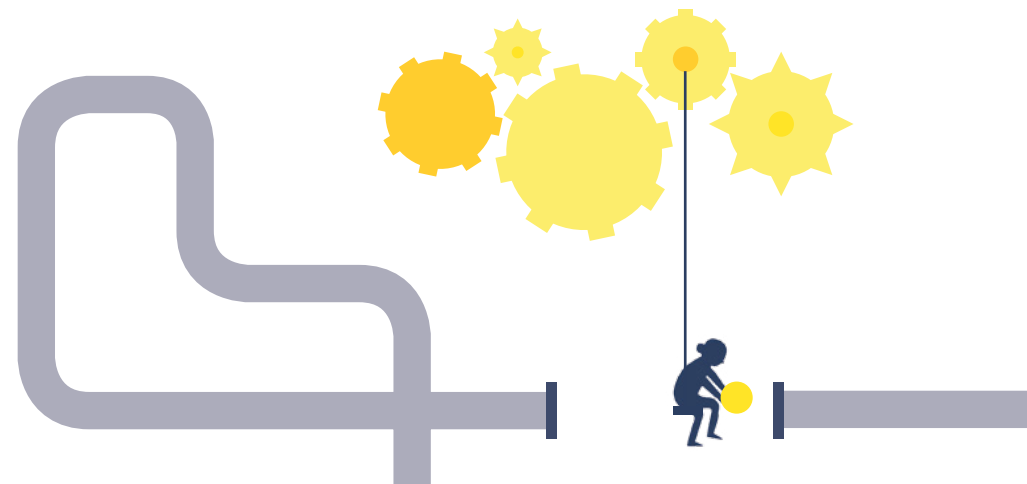
With respect to the Northern European area, some evaluations should be done with regard to national and regional economic policy measures. At the level of individual territories in which good practices are absolutely essential, public entities are aware that their task is to create an enabling environment to the birth and multiplication of SSE. It is therefore important to develop a shared strategic vision, of territories with a high concentration of SSE initiatives either in the form of districts or special areas or sectors with highly specialized productions. Indeed in some of the territories the importance of these enabling factors and public guidelines is perceived but there are numerous examples of good practices that already operate within public services but are confined in the logic of emergence and a targeted support and collaboration with the realities of SSE is lacking. In some areas the research highlights some experiences of genuine cooperation which should be replicated in all countries as they have already given good evidence of efficiency and effectiveness.

In the **Eastern Europe**, generally speaking, we cannot refer to a public policy articulated according to the needs of different sectors of the SSE. In some countries specific measures have recently been taken to regulate and support SSE sectors and specific activities. A first indication for the immediate future is that it would be very useful for Governments and local authorities to draft and share a public regulation able to stimulate the creation of new SSE businesses and, on the other hand, to encourage and support the existing activities that very often are original and interesting so they could be immediately replicated in other areas and other countries. Several of the analysed experiences already provide valuable solutions to social issues to be addressed and display ways best suited to solve the different problems in the territories.

A possible suggestion arising from the research is to elaborate a regulatory framework for SSE that takes into account the existing and potential activities, looking very carefully at the ongoing experiences in the other European countries with similar cultural traditions. Valuable measures could be elaborated on the job creation for disadvantaged people in activities related to environmental sustainability and migrations. Those measures could put European countries in direct contact with countries still are still striving to find their own sustainable development strategy. Under this legal framework direct support could be offered to early stages of networking and supply chains creation for SSE enterprises to link up the existing good practices encouraging their multiplication and horizontal integration. Finally, it is obvious that these regulations will be approved only if SSE entities exert appropriate pressure in some sectors that already today are considered necessary and urgent for the entire planet as all the experiences that pay attention to environmental issues and social inclusion”.

Last but not least, in the Mediterranean area some critical situations have emerged in the North-South relationships. It can be noted that in spite of the fact that international cooperation is rather developed and common in many countries, in this area there are scarce experiences of real partnership and sharing between North and South. Many of the experiences of SSE originated in the South, and they may be imitated and spread in many both in the North and South of the world but there is poor consciousness of the transformative potential to share and multiply them according to real partners' needs. These practices also support different local organizations and projects, promoting the creation of new jobs, an entrepreneurial spirit and the recovery of local activities like agriculture tourism, local handcraft. The main social externalities are concerned with job creation or recovery as well as the investment in rural territories preventing for instance the migration of youth.

One of the most noteworthy impacts of their action was the improvement of the use of local resources and the recovery of traditional economic activities rooted in the territories, such as agriculture or fishery. The association operates as a process facilitator, promoting the concept of local identity to stimulate relations between producers and consumers but also between producers. This leads to the an environment that is similar to that of a sharing economy: producers share materials, producers work in small groups to ensure fair prices and promote each other's products. The recovery of agriculture in a peri-urban territory was very relevant since it has had an immediate impact at the level of job creation, income generation and prevention of unemployment. The consumers gain a new commitment with their community and awareness of the impact of their actions, among others.

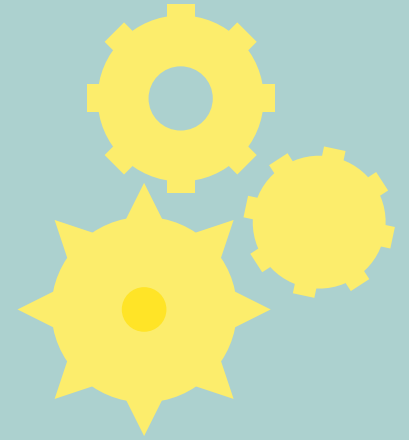






# Core Research

- Northern and Central Europe
- Mediterranean Area
- Eastern Europe
- World area
- Conclusions



# Northern and Central Europe

## SSE context in the good practices' Countries

In the entire region of Northern and Central Europe the solidarity economy sector is still not well defined in its scope and contents.

In the analysis on the Austrian experience, for instance, it is stated that there isn't a specific SSE action field; in all the good practices, the analyses start from a description of the so called "third sector" in which the solidarity economy is included. "At the moment, the discussion of Solidarity Economy is suffering from knowledge gaps. Knowledge concerning success factors of Solidarity Economy enterprises should be communicated more broadly, as well as knowledge of suitable legal forms for Solidarity Economies". What is relevant to highlight is that: "the significance of Solidarity Economy is grounded in the perspective of a comprehensive societal transformation. This transformation starts in niches, where people aim at a way of relating to each other which is based on equality, democracy and solidarity, with a concern for the whole world and future generations. Such niches are, for example, food coops, Fair Trade shops, popular kitchens and co-housings. The movement for food sovereignty, i.e. for the right of people to determine the production of their food in their own ways, is a good example for Solidarity Economy as a transformative movement. These niches exist within a system of social domination: of capitalism, sexism, racism and other forms of inequality and ruthlessness. Niches are contradictory and are only able to change parts of societal relations within specific contexts. Transformation is driven by developing the contradictions of Solidarity Economy."

So the organizations are conscious of some distinct and important characteristics of the SSE also if they tend to not give them much relevance as such in their countries. In the research on the **UK**, some areas of Solidarity Economy are described as relevant (Fair Trade Movement, increase of organic production in the cooperative movement, etc.), and in the area of greater London, numerous community initiatives on training of young people, local projects and organizations working on mutual and collective microcredit for sustainable initiatives are reported. The general analysis is conducted in reference to the

entire field of SSE, involving over 70,000 initiatives<sup>9</sup>, which means that there is a scope for a potential expansion of the related economic activities. One of the focus is around the cooperative movement, which is also extensive in size. A common definition of the SSE, however, isn't very common. For instance in the research by Think Global, it is stressed that the terminology 'Social and Solidarity Economy' has little to no relevance. Terms such as 'social economy', 'local economy', 'cooperatives' and 'social enterprise' are recognized, relevant and understood. Whatever term is used to describe it, this alternative collaborative economy represents a manifold range of businesses and enterprises in the United Kingdom, such as cooperatives, mutual institutions, social enterprises, and it has an incredibly rich history.

As outlined in the introduction section of the report, in recent years the British government has introduced massive measures of privatization and outsourcing of public services to private companies. While this has caused much discontent among many citizens due to concerns regarding the reduced quality of services and the worsened treatment of employees and service users, it has also provided an opportunity for mutuals, cooperatives and social enterprises to emerge as an alternative to the traditional profit-making private businesses. When dealing with cuts and privatization, many local authorities and public institutions preferred to outsource to cooperative or mutual businesses because of their people-centered and democratic approach, rather than addressing more traditional companies whose main focus is on profit-making.

In other countries, particularly **Belgium** and **Finland**, the research is entirely carried out in reference to the entire field of SSE, without distinctions. Moreover, **Belgium** is the only Country in the group of 18 territories of Northern Europe to refer to the field of development cooperation, pointing out that since 1994 attempts have been made to increase the overseas presence of projects concerning Solidarity Economy.

In **Finland**, where historically volunteer work is carried out by many of its citizens, there have been new initiatives that are ascribable to SSE activities.

9 [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/193555/bis-13-p74-small-business-survey-2012-sme-employers.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/193555/bis-13-p74-small-business-survey-2012-sme-employers.pdf)

In this context, however, concepts like sharing economy and circular economy are more comprehensible for and more diffused among the general public. Economic situation in **Finland** is not particularly good but there's still a strong public sector and a tradition of welfare-state which easily leads to a strong presence of the State support in the Third sector activities. The public sector has become weaker and this might provide new possibilities for SSE, as it is happening in **Germany**. The related research pays attention to agriculture and food related projects, highlighting the role of CSA model, urban gardens and local food councils. In Berlin the first Regional Food policy Council is active, with a focus on a fairer and more sustainable organization and management of food production and consumption.

In **Poland** the social sector includes over 100,000 of these initiatives and at least 17,000 have the legal form of cooperatives, mostly located in the capital and in major urban centers, while in **Ireland, Latvia** and **Estonia** the dimensions of social sectors aren't comparable to those of other countries in the region and are therefore still relatively little known.

## Data analysis

In this section, some quantitative and qualitative indicators have been developed from the information gathered in the research reports, so as to provide the reader with comparable data on the identified good practices. The qualitative indicators are based on some shared SSE criteria: environmental impact, social impact, participation, self-management/management share, networking ability and attention to communication and advocacy.

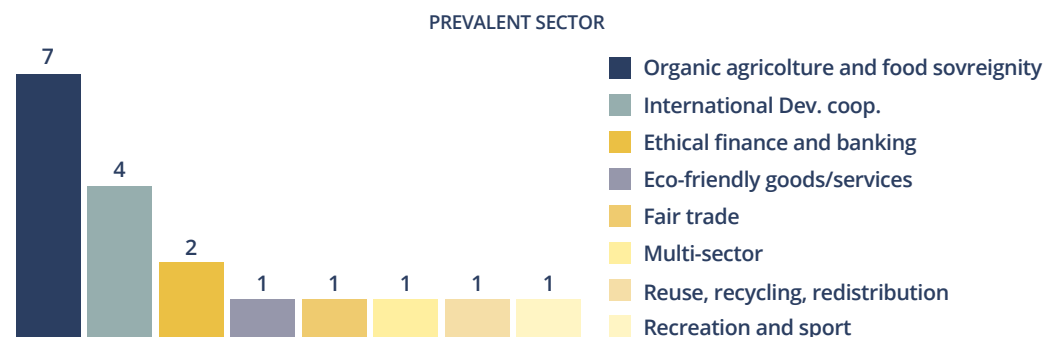
With respect to quantitative indicators, the analysis concerns SSE sectors and activities, estimates of the number of people directly or indirectly involved in the practices (employees, members, volunteers), of the turnover generated by the activities carried out and considerations on the legal form/informal structure taken by the practices.

Through these indicators it is possible to build an effective monitoring and evaluation system for the practices considered, in order to not only create a snapshot of the current data but also to find ways to strengthen the process towards a greater efficacy of the analyzed components.

## Sectors

The 18 selected good practices deal with different sectors or areas of competences of SSE. A first result shown by the analysis is the prevalence of practices identified in the **agricultural/food sector** (7 practices) and **Fair Trade sector** (4 practices). The other good practices identified operate in the fields of

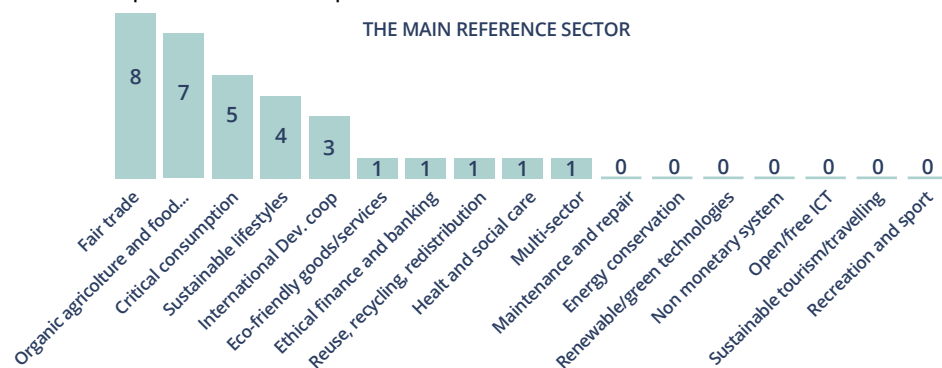
international cooperation (2 practices) and ethical finance, reuse and recycling, eco-friendly craftsmanship, local welfare services and multi-sector services (1 practice per sector). Food concerns continue to be a top priority for the general public: one of the strongest movements is focused in changing eating habits so that more organic food and Fair Trade products are consumed. It is not a brand new trend, as it could appear, but has a long history. The wellbeing of humanity and the environment is a priority for the organic and Fair Trade movement, which seeks to foster a sustainable development for all the parties involved in the process. Organic agriculture and Fair Trade include this holistic approach in their standards and criteria, which often also translates into paying proper attention to the working conditions under which members produce. A growing number of consumers is joining them and questioning labor standards.



The international organic agriculture and Fair Trade movements represent important initiatives enhancing environmental sustainability and social justice around the world. These movements criticize destructive production and consumption practices and strive to create a more sustainable and fair global food system. The international organic movement focuses on embedding “natural processes” (i.e. crop seasonality) in farm production, encouraging at the same time organic farming and markets for certified organic products. The Fair Trade movement focuses on embedding “equitable social relations” in the production and distribution mechanisms, developing a more egalitarian trade for socially and environmentally sustainable products.

These projects often intersect and complement each others: the organic movement in addressing environmental practices and the Fair Trade movement in addressing social practices. Though organic and Fair Trade certified products represent a minor share of the world trade, their production and consumption involve a large and rapidly growing number of people, enterprises

and commercial outlets. The organic and Fair Trade movements are making important strides in enhancing global environmental sustainability and social justice; however, their recent market successes confronts them with the challenge of expanding their outreach while remaining true to their core principles. The analysis of the different activities carried out by the practices shows that in many cases they concern more than a single sector. When grouping all these fields of action, it is possible to highlight the main reference sectors in order of predominance as follows: **Fair Trade** and the **agricultural and organic supply chain, critical consumption**, ethical finance, reuse and recycling, renewable energy, eco- friendly craftsmanship, local welfare services, multi-sector. There are also experiences in productive sectors (of goods and services), cultural activities and campaigning. This categorization is clearly limited and synthetic, given that there are practices that implement activities in several of these fields.

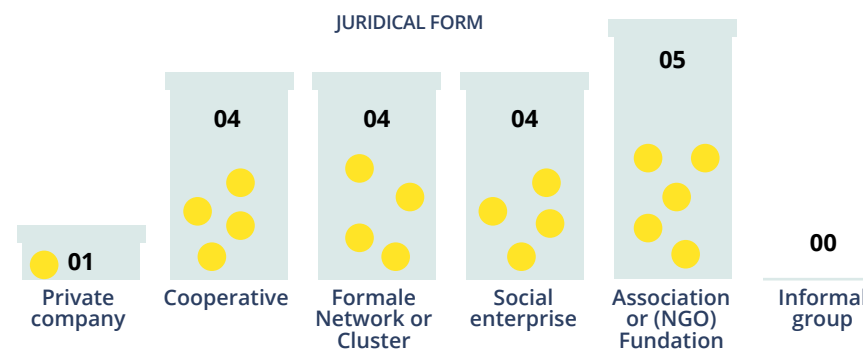


There is no evidence of models that interconnect these experiences in a systematic way in the territories. Experiences like the solidarity supply chains of manufacturers and consumers between town and countryside, the networks operating in the field of social communications and campaigning as well as innovative experiences such as the districts of solidarity economy are not diffused as, for instance, in Latin America or Southern Europe. The only attempts to create systemic connections can be partially found in the practices related to CSAs and urban gardening. When analysing the traditional economic functions carried out by the selected practices, the preponderance of the functions related to trade and services is evident (37%), followed by functions of production and processing (24%), consumption (22%) and distribution (17%).



## Participation

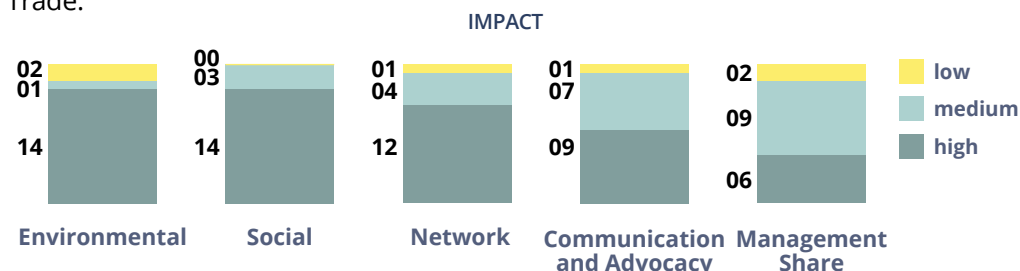
The analysed practices from Northern and Central Europe involve thousands of people in different ways, which show their great ability for engagement and at the same time the capacity to build a real alternative economy, to create employment, guarantee rights, expand individual and collective awareness on current social and economic processes, think of a community made of people and not just of consumers, clients and producers. In this geographical area, there are more than 10,000 people involved in various ways in SSE entities, while it is estimated that more than 1,000 people are employed directly or indirectly by them. It is one of the analysed area with the higher number of actors involved, but the capacity for engagement and jobs creation are different: there are realities with few work units employed, while there are other with several employees or members, like the Cooperative Manchester Home Care (UK) that employs 800 people. Another example is the organization Shared Interest (UK) with 9000 supporting members. With respect to the legal form of these organizations, it is interesting to observe that the majority of the practices are Associations, NGOs or Foundations (5), Cooperatives (4) and social enterprises (4), while there is only 1 private enterprise selected as good practice. In addition, there are also cluster or networks (4 taking different forms).



## Impact

As we know SSE practices are oriented towards objectives of collective interest. The promotion of partnerships and networking, a fair allocation of resources, the respect and the protection of the environment, the pursuit of social aims are features that are present in all the experiences considered. These experiences aim at the creation and the growth of initiatives dedicated to the production and exchange of goods and services and they work according to the principles of cooperation, reciprocity, responsible subsidiarity, sustainability and energetic-environmental compatibility. In particular, if we look at the identified practices it is

possible to qualitatively assess some impact indicators of some criteria. The following graph shows the impact of some values within the practices. For example we can observe the relevance of the social and environmental dimension in most of the practices analyzed, not only in this geographical area. Another positive factor to highlight is that related to the notable presence of thematic networks and shared campaigns in this area. On the contrary, the existence of rigid management structures, which in many cases are due to the legal forms of the organizations, don't always allow for the horizontal participation to the decision-making processes. Finally, when assessing the good practices' impact, it is fundamental to mention the existing weakness in the ability of advocating and communicating; however, this competence is still present and is certainly a factor of engagement and education particularly in the domains of cooperation and Fair Trade.



## Turnover

With respect to the turnover generated by the SSE practices in this area, it is only possible to make estimates because the figures are not complete or adequately defined for all the territories and entities.

We are talking about an economic value of more than 60 million EUR/year for the SSE organizations listed. The volumes of turnover produced by the SSE entities in this area are the highest ones mapped in the entire research. It's also important to highlight that some of the selected good practices that pertain to this area reach turnover levels that are higher than those of any other organization mapped in the research: Shared Interest with approximately 42,500,000 EUR/year and Manchester Home Car with around 14,200,000 EUR/year.

## Solutions against the economic crisis

Generally speaking, the role and development of the SSE in these countries has been a key aspect against gentrification, high unemployment and the environmental impacts of the crisis. As a matter of fact there are many practices that intervene directly in the local context to counteract growing poverty and marginalization mechanisms in these areas, to create opportunities for new

business and above all to offer professional and technical training to enable young people to enter the job market. In all these fields mutuals, cooperatives and social enterprises emerge as an alternative to the traditional profit-making private businesses.

The practice Home Care (**UK**), for instance, goes in this direction by building a local neighborhood welfare that not only provides benefits to the community but at the same time contributes to job creation and innovative way of doing business. The practices of CSAs in **Austria, Finland, Ireland and Germany** are of particular interest, as emerging schemes oriented towards food sovereignty willing to show that it is possible to support income as well as quality of life for different people with small scale solutions at local level. This is the main reason why they are rather important instruments to counteract the negative impacts caused by the ongoing systemic crisis.

Such examples also represent the empowerment of grassroots holistic responses to community problems. With government spending cuts and austerity policies affecting those who are most vulnerable, local communities are increasingly coming together to fill the gap in social support through the creation of training opportunities, jobs and green and ethical business proposals.

Foodsharing.de, for example, is a German online platform, also used in **Austria** and Switzerland, which connects people on a local level to prevent food waste. Every year 18 million tons of food are thrown away in **Germany**, of which 10 million is avoidable waste<sup>10</sup> – which means food that is still edible. In **Latvia** the charity shop identified as good practice tries to meet the social goal of enhancing the well being of socially vulnerable groups with the engagement of youth and through the reuse of belongings. Those are all effective responses to different aspects of the crisis.

## South-North exchanges

The Northern and Central area of Europe is particularly focused on the relationships between the global North and South. Some of the selected practices have direct contacts with the southern hemisphere and implement international cooperation projects. The Fair Trade movement definitely plays a remarkable role in addressing different development gaps in many countries of the South, and it is represented in 8 analysed practices.

The experiences identified in **Poland, UK, Estonia** and **Austria** represent a good example of how Fair Trade and global education can bridge the gap between

10 WWF, Das große Wegschmeißen (2014)

SSE and Development Cooperation. Fair Trade has been introduced in this area by several NGOs that presented the importance of such a trade when it comes to combating global poverty, because consumers play an important role in global trade. Their decisions about what to buy can have a direct impact on the working and living conditions of people in the Global South. Fair Trade can assist certified producers in grouping together into local organizations and practicing sustainable ways of production with concerns on how to improve their living and working conditions.

Fair Trade aims to foster sustainable livelihoods among small producers and workers by enabling improvements in income, decent working conditions and sustainable ecosystems. Fair Trade as a system proves that trade can be a fundamental driver of poverty reduction and greater sustainable development, but only if it is managed for that purpose, with great equity and transparency. "Fair Trade is a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency and respect, that seeks greater equity in international trade. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions to, and securing the rights of, marginalized producers and workers – especially in the South. Fair Trade organizations (backed by consumers) are engaged actively in supporting producers, awareness raising and in campaigning for changes in the rules and practice of conventional international trade"<sup>11</sup>. In addition, there are various practices (**Belgium, Austria and Germany**) dealing with international cooperation and that also have in common the support to sustainable agriculture projects both in the Northern and in the Southern hemisphere. From the point of view of financial flows to the South, this area is certainly stronger also thanks to the British case of Shared Interest which supports many projects with the principles of ethical finance. Several of these practices that have no direct relationship with the South, such as CSAs, can be certainly good examples that can be adapted to different contexts and replicated elsewhere.



11 This definition, created by the World Fair Trade organization, was adopted 2001 by FINE, an informal umbrella group of the four main international Fair Trade networks

## Critical aspects

### Defining SSE

As already stressed in the introduction section of the report, the 'social and solidarity economy' as concept has little to no relevance in this area, while terms like 'social economy', 'local economy', 'cooperatives' and 'social enterprise' are recognized, relevant and understood by general public. The representatives from SSE organizations interviewed conceive SSE in terms of different business models seeking to address social needs and investing in local communities. Professor Francis Davis, the founder of one of the selected good practices - Cathedral Innovation Centre - believes that the SSE calls for inventions and creativity in addressing social needs and can be considered as a powerful tool to compensate for the shortcomings produced by the dismantlement of the welfare state.

This concept is further reiterated by social movement organizations' representatives, who stress that SSE can foster the creation of sustainable and innovative initiatives which are locally-owned and locally-driven. Therefore, a movement, company or organization are committed to grow into a sustainable model and maintain economies of scale. This may result in the creation of numerous small businesses without a common network which links them. For this reason it is crucial to connect initiatives that are working successfully, to share good practices and to use new technologies to overcome geographical hurdles.

### Communication and advocacy

The general public remains insufficiently informed about the opportunities created by social economy, largely because public media often overlook the issue and campaigns may not generate the expected impacts. Emerging social enterprises struggle to retain their presence on the market, while informational and educational activities are not sufficiently supported by public administrations.

As we have previously noted in the qualitative impact figures of these experiences in different contexts, in fact these part of the activities that should be carried out in support of practical activities appear too limited and therefore still do not play a necessary role in promoting and multiplying even in the

best experiences. Communication and advocacy activities carried out by some of the selected practices should be greatly enhanced so as to promote the logic of solidarity economy to change the national economic outcome. In this field of activity, interaction between local authorities, universities and public organizations for SMEs and specific realities of SSE are crucial.

## Strategic economic policies

The same evaluations should be done with regards to national and regional economic policy measures. At the level of individual territories in which good practices are absolutely essential, public entities are generally aware that their task is to create a conducive environment for the creation and multiplication of SSE. It is therefore central to develop a shared strategic vision, of territories with a high concentration of SSE initiatives either in the form of districts or special areas or sectors with highly specialized productions.

Indeed in some of the territories the importance of these enabling factors and public guidelines is perceived but there are numerous examples of good practices that already operate within public services but are confined in the logic of emergence and a targeted support and collaboration with the realities of SSE is lacking. In some of the territories some experiences of effective collaboration are listed and should be replicated in all countries as they have already given good evidence of efficiency and effectiveness. As an example we can mention “Food Councils” in **Germany** and incubator firms in the **UK**.

## Points of interest

There are different ideas and considerations that can be summarized and highlighted from the research in this area.

### Innovative agriculture

The prevalence and attention to issues related to food allow to develop proposals that are innovative and able to implement visions that go beyond the practice. For example the experiences of CSA and the various proposals for Urban gardening in **Austria, Finland, Ireland** and **Germany** can be considered as models that are considered as SSE practices. Referring to **Germany**, CSAs aim to create an alternative development model in the agricultural sector in harmony with producers, consumers and nature. CSA is

a partnership between farmers and consumers in which the responsibilities, risks and rewards of farming are shared. CSA helps to address increasing concerns about the lack of transparency, sustainability and resilience of our food systems.

In a CSA, the food is not distributed via the market, but in an own transparent economic cycle which is organized and financed by the participants themselves. The principles of a CSA are solidarity, community, fairness and grassroots democracy. The small-scale farms could actually meet all these needs and yet it is precisely these farms that are in the process of disappearing. Under current conditions, farmers are often faced with the “choice” of exploiting either nature or themselves.

They are dependent for their survival as farmers on subsidies, (world) market prices and on weather conditions – all of which are outside their influence. The constant pressure on prices for agricultural produce often forces them to go beyond their personal stress limits, to exploit the soil and animals they work with – and in many cases to get out of farming completely. Organic farming is also subject to these mechanisms.

### New urban perspectives

Urban gardens, shared gardens, collective farming created and maintained by neighbourhood associations in small plots of land provided by the city or occupied are a piece of countryside in town whose role is not only to give the opportunity for citizens to “get their hands dirty with the Earth”. Through the creation of shared spaces, the urban gardening becomes in fact a space generating and promoting social and cultural ties, a tool that can create mental, physical and relational well-being and at the same time it can be an opportunity to exercise and maybe grow vegetables suitable for healthy eating (Finland, Ireland and Germany).

### Reversing industrial food processing damages

In the agricultural sector there are certain practices that intervene on the damages generated by the global food system, which is based on the economic interests of global companies and it is harming humans, animals, and the environment. The concentration of market shares and powers in the agricultural sector contribute to a further deepening of the gap between the rich and poor, and between the global North and South.

In order to bring about a change in food and agricultural policies, we need to meet this challenge: ensure that the production, distribution and disposal of our food is environmentally sustainable and socially just. There are numerous unfair





mechanisms of injury, many of which relate to the predominance of agricultural crops for industrial purposes, products that require chemical fertilizers and that are therefore unhealthy for human and animal nutrition. And finally all waste amounting to several million tons - 88 just in Europe<sup>12</sup> - not only down the chain of excessive concentration of supermarkets, but also deriving from food intake in homes and communities (hospitals or restaurant chains). It is interesting to notice in the research that there are some experiences that seek to reduce such waste (Germany anti waste platform) and this type of experiences should become examples to be imitated in all countries.

## Food Policies

Food policy councils are an innovative tool that can help us to make our food system more democratic and sustainable for present and future generations. People from different backgrounds come to the same table to draw up nutrition policy for the region. Food policy councils can be flexibly adapted to the needs of cities and communities and they can already be found in many parts of the world. They have created infrastructure and projects that promote participation and horizontality in decisions on food policy in their regions.

These Food Policy Council are organizations that bring together different actors involved in land/food in urban areas (farmers, SPGs, small distribution, local markets, urban orchards, local authorities) in order to start to re-territorialize the food system. Their task is to make urban agriculture become an integral part of city planning and to facilitate access to land and water. But the Councils also deal with food security and sovereignty and, more generally, with food related policies. The food councils can be found in various cities across North America and the **UK, Germany** and the Netherlands. In Amsterdam food has been on the agenda in recent years, the city is teeming with food-related initiatives and the municipality is writing a new Food Policy.

Currently food policy councils are starting to emerge in **Germany**. Volunteers in Berlin and Cologne are working hard to set them up in their regions, in order to establish networks of urban and rural areas, promote regionally grown and seasonal food and place food and agriculture on the political agenda. The Berlin food policy council is well connected through meetings and multi-stakeholder workshops with the various stakeholders of the process. The researchers indicate that stakeholders in all four German territories identified Food Policy

12 European Commission, Stop food waste - [http://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/food\\_waste/stop\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/food_waste/stop_en)

councils as an innovative tool which they want to implement in their cities in the course of this project.

## Sustainability of the activities

All these experiences considered and selected in the research have an important positive impact on sustainability. Most of these realities, in fact are environmentally, socially and economically sustainable, they avoid chemical substances, genetically modified organisms, are small scale, and not oriented towards profit maximization, but towards the satisfaction of needs of people and towards the needs of nature. They are self-determined in the management and work accordingly to the abilities and possibilities of participants.

## Self-organized communities

As outlined in the introduction section of the report, in recent years in Europe a massive action of privatization and outsourcing of public services to private companies has been developed also because of the austerity measures.

The experience of Manchester Home Care is a very interesting one: an employee-owned social enterprise, specializing in providing care and support to people living in their own homes. Employees are able to participate in decisions which affect their working lives, and after six months of being a member, they are eligible to receive a share of the profits that the business generates, depending on territory performance and group profits.

The organization's unique structure means that staff members have the opportunity to take part in democratic bi-monthly general meetings and help set the company's budgets, pay and conditions. They can also elect or stand to be on the General Council, which appoints people onto the Executive Board and approves key decisions on how the business is run.

Yet again another example of a self-organized and self-managed initiative, which in turn translates into the strengthening of the social inclusion aspect.

Of course the selected and analysed examples make very evident that this kind of initiatives requires a high level of political and public engagement in the development of SSE.



## Fair and solidarity trade and international food sovereignty rights

The role of Fair Trade in transforming patterns is highlighted in practices located in the **UK, Poland, Estonia** and **Austria**. The term Fair Trade emerged in northern Europe as an attempt to introduce justice and solidarity into trade between northern and southern countries. For thousands of producers in southern countries, it has been and remains an excellent opportunity to obtain better quality production, better prices, better working conditions and improved quality of life for them and their families.

Fair Trade should not be reduced to a simple sales strategy, since it can also drive sustainable local production, decent jobs, equitable relation between sexes, etc. By promoting the creation of networks and organization between small-scale local producers, placing a higher value on work and environmental protection and appealing to consumers to make responsible purchasing choices part of daily life, it gives a more supportive basis to the relations involved in production, sales and consumption. It is important to note that after more than 40 years since the first experience, this realm is still being expanded and in different countries where it emerges as a new formula of cooperation with southern hemisphere (often articulate and enriched in different countries) is still a remarkable way to establish relationship between countries, so as to introduce elements of solidarity within the international trade flows.

Its recent recognition of south-south and north-north trade means that it now also encompasses the local dimension, refocusing on the local market and incorporating notions such as food sovereignty and security, human rights and environmental protection. However, neither Fair Trade, solidarity finance or local currencies can solve all development problems. Every actor in the value chain has to be included. Fair Trade producers could become one of the links in a solidarity-based chain of production that partners institutions and networks promoting the SSE with social enterprises, groups of organized consumers and, in some cases, public policies supporting these initiatives.

This would involve actions such as reshaping solidarity-based production chains by giving preference to suppliers who respect solidarity-based and environmental criteria and creating companies using funding from solidarity finance initiatives to avoid the supremacy of big corporations, until reaching the end consumers.

## International solidarity funding (development and environmental protection projects)

A relevant experience in the ethical finance that of the British good practice Shared Interest, an ethical investment organization that provides financial services and business support to improve the livelihoods and living standards of disadvantaged communities in some of the world's poorest countries. As highlighted by the researchers, the organization promotes a fair, cooperative approach to finance and strives for a sustainable investment strategy which ensures a positive outcome for farmers and investors alike. It focuses on long-term loans and support for producers rather than a 'quick fix' and ensures that the money it lends goes to something tangible that will help the producers to build a sustainable and successful business going forward.

The economic and social impact on farmers is also seen through the work of its sister charity, Shared Interest Foundation. The charity delivers grass roots training for fledgling cooperatives, mainly in Africa, building their knowledge and capacity of skills such as financial accounting and network building.

The transformative impact in the countries of the global South is demonstrated by the increase in the well being and livelihoods of the producers that Shared Interest supports, as well as increasing the confidence and dignity of the farmers who benefit from these loans. They can be proud of the fact that they are the ones who are bringing in money for their families and are not dependent on charitable hand-outs or donations.

In the near future, similar practices should be replicated in the Global South as well as in other areas of the world affected by the crisis. There are a number of projects of great interest that do not find sufficient sources of financing so the availability of funding schemes tailored on the needs of SSE could be crucial to its development and diffusion as effective answers to tackle side effects of the global crisis and austerity measure.



# Mediterranean Area

## SSE context in the good practices' Countries

The Mediterranean area includes 17 good practices in 8 Countries. Some territories and countries included in this area seem to identify them more precisely as initiatives to be indicated as “solidarity economy”, although sometimes the definition “social economy” is more used. In **Italy**, for instance, the Social Economy is one of the sector with the highest added value in the Country's regions. It played and still plays a key role at the local level both in terms of social cohesion and as an enabler for the local development. Furthermore, the Social Economy organizations are an excellence in the area: the presence and activity of associations, social cooperatives and voluntary organizations help creating and strengthening the regional social and economic fabric. The growth of these organizations in terms of importance has highlighted the need to measure the specific contribution they can guarantee to the community they serve in terms of social cohesion and social innovation. Is possible to identify the specific contribution (or value added) they bring to the welfare system and also to describe the main characteristics of the work done in the field (creation of social cohesion, cooperation with Local authorities, social innovation, changes in rules of competition, fixing the crisis).

A national survey by the Farmers Union Coldiretti has claimed that 18% of Italians (about 7 million people) are allegedly involved in forms of collective production and supply chains. About 150,000 people may be involved in solidarity-driven collective productions and supply chains such as SPGs. SPGs are grassroots networks that collectively organize direct provisioning, mostly of food and other items of everyday use but increasingly also of textiles and “alternative” services such as renewable energy, sustainable tourism, or even dental insurance. Retegas.org is Italy's SPGs network, for which “solidarity” means cooperation and sympathy with producers, the environment, and other SPGs members.

These networks evolved in several territories in models that have been described as “Districts of Solidarity Economy” or DESs. They are networks of associations, providers and consumers that exchange goods and services in the name of shared principles of solidarity. Retecosol.org is the portal for Italy's DESs. Tavolo RES is the National Working Group that promotes, supports and connects DES projects. Actually there are 32 publicized DES projects in the country.

In **France**, the 200,000 companies involved in the SSE field employ over 2 million people, 1 every 8 private-sector employees. Activities in the sector account for almost 10% of GDP.

In the past ten years, the SSE created 440,000 new jobs – an increase of 23%, compared to that of 7% of the traditional economy. In 2014 the Act no. 2014-856 of July 31 on SSE was approved. The law defines SSE, creates a High Council for SSE, a National Chamber and Regional Chambers. The Act amends or adds numerous provisions on the establishment of social economy enterprises, the transfer of enterprises to their employees, it modifies the cooperative sector and modifies the law of associations, etc. The law recognizes that: “SSE is a means of manipulating and expanding the economy focusing on all fields of human activity to which legal entities under private law meeting the following cumulative conditions adhere: a target pursued not merely by sharing profits; democratic governance and responsible management”. In countries such as France some additional features are shared by SSE entities such as limits to the organizations' profits, the capacity to mobilize people in the territories where they operate and to achieve positive externalities in collective interest. In the Country, competent institutions to regulate solidarity initiatives have also been created, especially the French Chamber for SSE and the “Cash deposits”, which raises funds and finances projects in the relevant sectors.

In **Spain**, SSE appears as a possible and actual reality for another economy. Recognized as a derivation and articulation of the tradition of the Social Economy (mainly composed of cooperatives, mutuals and association), it is identified as a revival of socio-economic experiences in recent decades. In March 2011, the Country adopted the Law on Social Economy with the basic objective of setting up a legal framework to provide visibility and recognition to the Social Economy, giving it a greater legal certainty through the definition of the Social Economy sector. According to the Spanish Business Confederation of Social Economy (CEPES), “the social economy is a key socio-economic actor, with more than 45,000 companies that generate 10% of GDP and 12% of employment in the country.” The SSE movement is rich and well established, in addition to being strongly represented by one of the most important national SSE network of networks: the Red de Redes de Economía Alternativa y Solidaria (REAS), which is a confederal partnership composed of 18 networks (14 territorial and sectoral) which bring together more than 500 entities and companies, the participation of

more than 38,000 members - in addition to 8,300 people employed for specific tasks - and 355 million EUR in annual turnover. The importance given to the establishment of SSE networks is one of its main features and, at the same time, one of its identifying aspects that make it stand out in the Social Economy. In Spain, this sector has been characterized also by a strong and widespread presence of agricultural activities, sustainable supply chains and many organic or alternative initiatives, which are mainly concerned with networking so as to create close ties, even if informal, with other existing experiences.

In countries such as **Greece** the solidarity economy gained ground tremendously after the crisis of 2008, but it's considered a very young domain and the informal sector is quite lively also if not all its activities can be ascribable to the SSE sector. SSE initiatives have a very hard yet important part to play in the future on the Country: they must cover vital social needs as well as being the driving force for social change, even if facing challenges in a hostile environment. In any case it should be taken into consideration that the majority of the initiatives - with or without legal recognition - are less than 3 years old so it is still too early to predict if they will be sustainable as part of an SSE ecosystem.

In **Cyprus** SSE has had a strong development but also recent problems with credit cooperatives. Outside the cooperative movement there is an outbreak of social economy activities that include advocacy, welfare support to vulnerable groups, environment and other community initiatives. However, the lack of a framework both in terms of government recognition as well as of public awareness of the social economy or solidarity economy principles often led those initiatives to be created ad-hoc and to collapse once the initial enthusiasm wore off. The initiatives that did make it through to 2015 are better planned and much more conscious of being part of the social economy than they were before the crisis, with solidarity becoming an increasingly important part of their identity.

In **Malta** it is not possible to identify a comprehensive network of SSE organizations, although a number of SSE actors are present. Unfortunately, the lack of an adequate regulation and of coordination among the actors did not create an environment for sufficient State support, thus limiting the exploitation of the sector's full potential. SSE has been gaining ground in recent years, attracting more State attention, particularly after the Country's accession to the EU. Malta is currently trying to rationalize its action within the sector, giving space to private initiatives within the welfare system. While social enterprises have no formal regulation in the Country, the issues that they are supposed to tackle are part of the fields of engagement of a number of not-for-profit and/or

for-profit organizations, which employ a large number of people but often rely on voluntary work. The Maltese context is characterized by a vibrant and diverse NGO sector, a well-developed voluntary sector and a relatively widespread presence of cooperatives. The picture that emerges from an analysis of SSE in Malta is that the different actors are working individually, with low opportunities of exchanging good practices and expertise. This, in turn, often translates into duplication of initiatives and an overall lack of coordination.

Over the last thirty years there has been a rapid development of the SSE sector in **Portugal**, which now encompasses more than 200,000 active supporters and several coordination initiatives especially in major sectors. More than 94% of the active organizations are operating in the solidarity economy and define themselves as associations, thereby excluding the cooperative structure. In 2010 the sector has been included as a component of the national budget and GDP. The newly created Portuguese Network of Solidarity Economy (RPES) includes close to 45 professionals, organizations and informal groups that wish to promote an alternative economy, according to the network's manifesto. The RPES intends to gather organizations, institutions, informal groups and individuals that identify themselves with the vision and practices of the solidarity economy, so as to understand processes of production, trade, consumption, distribution, generation of income, savings and investment, which combine economy with solidarity, environmental perspective, cultural diversity, critical reflection, participatory democracy and local development.

## Data analysis

In this section, some quantitative and qualitative indicators have been developed from the information gathered in the research reports, so as to provide the reader with comparable data on the identified good practices. The qualitative indicators are based on some shared SSE criteria: environmental impact, social impact, participation, self-management/management share, networking ability and attention to communication and advocacy. With respect to quantitative indicators, the analysis concerns SSE sectors and activities, estimates of the number of people directly or indirectly involved in the practices (employees, members, volunteers), of the turnover generated by the activities carried out and considerations on the legal form/informal structure taken by the practices. Through these indicators it is possible to build an effective monitoring and evaluation system for the practices considered, in order to not only create a snapshot of the current data but also to find ways to strengthen the process towards a greater efficacy of the analyzed components.

## Sectors

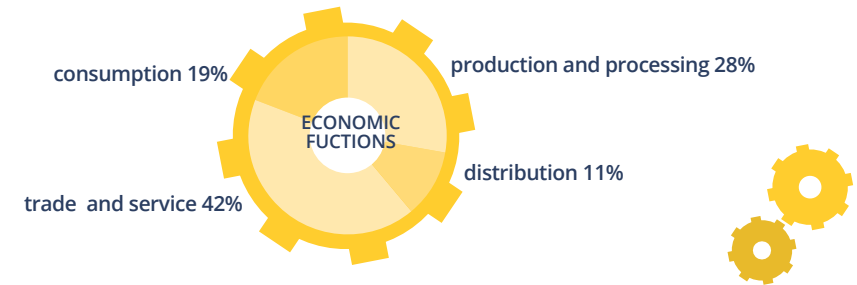
The 17 selected good practices deal with different SSE sectors or competences. A first result shown by the analysis is the prevalence of practices identified in the **agricultural/food sector** (9 practices) and **multi-sector services** (3 practices). The other prevalent sectors in which the practices operate are reuse, recycling and redistribution (2 practices), ethical finance, eco-friendly craftsmanship and green technologies (1 practice each).



The graph above reflects the local dimension of a worldwide trend: the rise of organic food and of agricultural practices that are more aware of the potential environmental and health impacts of what we eat. In the Mediterranean area the international organic movement is gaining ground rapidly, pushing for a change in the eating habits and in the awareness of consumers, who, through their purchases can play a strong market role. By analysing the different activities of the selected practices we find that the main reference sectors are: **agricultural and organic supply chain**, critical consumption, Fair Trade, ethical finance, reuse and recycling, renewable energy, eco-friendly product, multi-sector services. There are also experiences in productive sectors (of goods and services), cultural activities and campaigning. This categorization is clearly limited and synthetic, given that there are practices that implement activities in several of these fields.



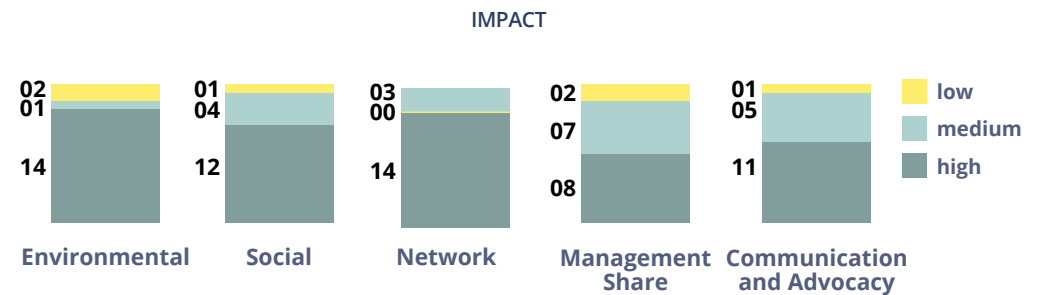
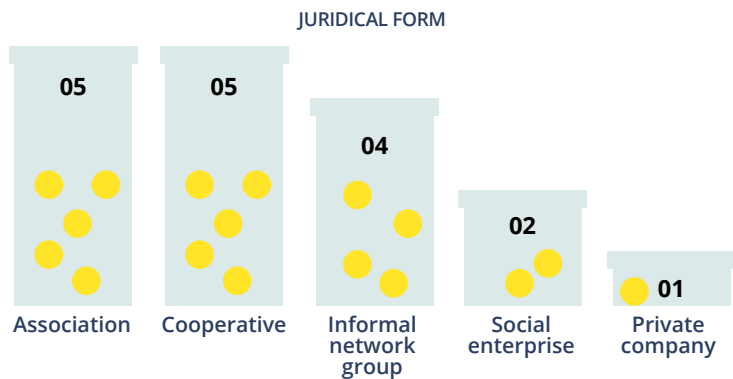
Many of the practices considered combine these experiences in a systematic way in the territories. Experiences like the solidarity supply chains that interconnects producers and consumers between town and countryside, as well as networks operating in the field of social communications and campaigning and innovative experiences as districts of solidarity economy are diffused in this area. Attempts to create systemic connections among experiences can be partially found in **Italy, Spain, Portugal**, especially in the food and agricultural sector. When analysing the traditional economic functions carried out by the selected practices in the area, a preponderance of the functions related to **trade and services** (42%) is noticeable, followed by functions of production and processing (28%), consumption (19%) and distribution (11%).



## Participation

One of the main features of SSE entities, that stands out especially when comparing them to more traditional types of organization in the conventional economy, is the relevance attributed to the centrality of the person over profits, which can be synthesized in the formula "people before profit". This aspect shows how engagement plays a remarkable role in the SSE, in which social objectives and values are prioritized and principles such as inclusiveness, democracy, attention to the disadvantaged segments of the population are essential elements. The practices considered in this geographical area are in line with this characteristics, given that there are more than 3,500 people involved in various ways and more than 300 people directly or indirectly employed by these entities.

With respect to the legal form of these organizations, it is interesting to observe that the majority of the practices are mainly organized as Cooperatives (5) or Not-for-profit Associations (5), while a few of them take the form of social or private enterprise (2 practices and 1, respectively). In addition, there are also active clusters and networks (4 with different forms).



## Impact

As we know SSE practices are oriented towards collective interest objectives. The promotion of the relationships between different entities, a fair allocation of resources, the respect and the safeguard of the environment, the pursuit of social aims are features that are present in all the experiences analysed. These good practices are therefore oriented towards the creation and the growth of initiatives dedicated to the production and exchange of goods and services and they work according to the principles of cooperation, reciprocity, responsible subsidiarity, sustainability and energetic- environmental compatibility. In particular, if we look at the practices identified with the research it is possible to qualitatively assess some impact indicators of some criteria.

The following graph shows the impact of some values within the practices. For example we can observe that the high value given to environmental and the social aspects in most of the practices analysed. In this area and more than elsewhere, great consideration is given to the networking dimension which is equally relevant to the environmental one.

Another key element to mention is that the management share within the good practices considered is much more horizontal than in other analysed geographical areas, but a similar weakness of the ability to communicate and advocate is registered. More generally with regard to the impact of the practices there is a relative weakness in the ability of advocacy and communication, but certainly compared to other areas analysed this competency is still present and constitutes a factor of engagement and education particularly in the area of cooperation and Fair Trade.

## Turnover

Regarding the income generated by these practices, it is only possible to make estimates because the given figures are not complete or adequately defined, but as a whole we are talking about an economic dimension of more than 23 million EUR. This area is the one with the highest economic volume, though it should be noticed that the practices' turnover vary considerably in size.

## Solutions against the economic crisis

In general the role and development of the SSE in these countries has been vital in order to protect against gentrification, high unemployment and worse environmental impact generated by the general crisis. In this area the various general crises (economic, financial, social, environmental, political, cultural and knowledge) have caused numerous hardships and uncertainties (social, environmental, cultural, economic and political) and have evidenced the profound weaknesses and failures of the dominant economic and political models. The crisis in this geographical area has had a tremendous effect on people's lifestyle: the general public is now much more aware of what it is consuming, how it is produced, the costs and impact of delocalisation and "competitive" large scale international trade. They perceive themselves more and more as citizens, not just as consumers, and understand their power in shifting from an unhealthy and unsustainable consumption, to a co-production where they have an active role and a relationship with the producers. They are empowering themselves as they come to realize the possibilities of organizing the economy in a different way.

All the different form of SSE like organic farming, consumer groups, renewable energy production, cooperatives and Fair Trade are growing - though slower than

in the past. These fields are not exempt from the economic crisis and can be overwhelmed by it (especially if they mimic the competitive model), but they're much more vibrant. The main lesson learned is that more holistic networking and cooperation can turn the crisis into a real opportunity to involve more people and to take part in the re-creation of a different economy, one that responds to the needs of individuals and communities, and not to the greed of profit makers and exclusive private interests. In this sense, when the different experiences are bridged together, they are able not just to survive the wreckage of the crisis, but to benefit from the active mutual initiative that solidarity economy represents. Many considered practices center their action on the local dimension which allows them to have a special focus on the microeconomic dimension that fosters the organizations' ability to identify needs and intervene in contexts of poverty and marginalization of the global crisis. These activities aim at job creation and at bettering working conditions, while at the same time paying particular attention to the social innovation dimension of their work. Cooperatives and social enterprises, as well as other SSE entities, show higher efficiency and effectiveness than conventional for-profit organizations.

In the last 10 years, workers in SSE enterprises have increased from 11 million in 2002-2003 to 15 million and they now represent 6,5% of the working population of the EU. This number does not include all the informal ways and the mixed forms of SSE practices and initiatives (from self-production, co-construction, to barter, social currencies, time banks, etc.). CSAs and Solidarity Consumers and Producers Groups are multiplying in many forms: there were only a few hundred examples by the end of the 1990s active in a small number of countries, while tens of thousands of such experiences exist currently.

In **Greece** the experience of Solidarity for all is a remarkable one. This organization has been active at national level, offering coordination and practical assistance to all kinds of initiatives in many fields, ranging from social clinics and pharmacies to community kitchens and food distribution, from social grocery stores to free sharing and social economy, etc. Solidarity for all is a 'child' of the crisis: it was formed to address the needs for interconnection, communication, facilitation and coordination of all the diverse structures, movements and initiatives that have sprung because of the crisis and its effects on the people of this country. Another notable practice in Greece is BioMe, the first and only self-managed industrial facility at this time at national level.. The initiative was created and shared by half the employees of the former blooming industrial company that was specialized in connective materials and strong cleaning products. The effort of the unpaid workers to take their future into their own hands and to claim the means of production as well as the facility itself, sprung

a solidarity movement that was not limited within the borders of the Country. Since almost four years now BioMe has been evolving together with the initiatives in its support, which have played their role in many different ways.

They have served as support network to the employees, as a solidarity movement towards industrial workers being left unemployed because industrial facilities are abandoned and companies are going bankrupt, as well as a distribution network for the products of BioMe, and, finally, as advocates and as a widened general assembly. There are a lot of lessons to be learned by this practice. BioMe has shown that working closely with the solidarity people and including them in the operation of the initiative it can bring very positive results. BioMe has been struggling to prove that self-managed production can exist. This is the first initiative of its kind in Greece and it has made clear that there is another way to do things. In order to do that BioMe has used to the fullest every resource it could get. Whether that was solidarity or self-managed production or technical knowhow, the employees/employers have made something out of it and this has been a key success factor.

In **France**, according to IÉS - Initiatives pour une Économie Solidaire, the finance and the local economy may be reconciled to commit citizens to a local economic project through individual ownership of company shares. It demonstrates the relevance and the success of a short financial cycle. Through the financed projects, it instills in individuals awareness of the fact that they can become an important part of that process. Moreover, all projects which IÉS finances are having a significant environmental impact on the territory. Since it was formed in 1998, 87 companies (including 14 insertion companies) have been financed. At present, 53 companies are being supported. These companies generally account for tertiary activities in the sectors of the environment, renewable energy, bio and equitable trade, construction, culture and leisure, social services, food production, transport and catering. In 17 years of operations, more than 800 jobs have been created or maintained. Currently, IÉS is supporting more than 600 jobs. Through what it does, IÉS' aim is to revitalize the territory by increasingly supporting local employment. IÉS has done significant work focusing on the financial viability of companies supported. Work to analyses problems has been undertaken to consolidate on the instruction phase which takes place before the financing decision is made.

## South-North exchanges

The South-North relationships in the Mediterranean area aren't much developed. As a matter of fact, only a few practices have direct contact with the Global South through development cooperation projects. There are various practices dealing with international cooperation (in **Spain** and **Portugal**) that also have in common the support to sustainable agriculture projects both in the northern and in the southern hemisphere.

Another good example is the store Almocafre in **Spain**: a not-for-profit consumers' cooperative with around 2,500 Fair Trade references, of which 80% are local or regional, while the rest is from the Country and abroad. It is interesting to highlighting the campaign in support of Palestinian products within the "ARCA" programme. ADREPES is active in cooperation with Cape Verde (Encurtar Distâncias) under the protocol established between Palmela Municipality and Santa Antão Municipality and, on the other hand, Monte NGO works in Portuguese speaking African countries like Guinea or Cape Verde.

## Critical aspects

### Defining SSE

Researchers report that in this area the 'social and solidarity economy' it is a concept generally acknowledged, and also definitions such as 'social economy', 'local economy', 'cooperative' and 'social enterprise' are recognized, relevant and well understood by general public.

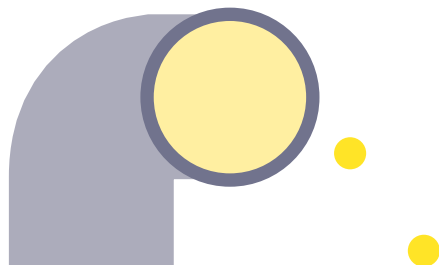
The SSE experiences have primarily a local dimension, focusing on the need of communities so as to strengthen them. This shows the need to networking, sharing and collaborating in order for the practices to possibly grow into sustainable models and maintain sustainable dimensions and turnovers.

### Communication and advocacy

As already mentioned in the analysis of other geographical areas, the communication and advocacy activities implemented in the Mediterranean region aren't systematic and have a scarce outreach. Many identified good practices are experimenting innovative ways of communication through social media platforms, though their use isn't evenly registered in all the initiatives. It is however interesting to notice that the higher capacity of communication and advocacy of those practices that adopt networking methods of organizing their operations. The importance of such activities lies in their potential engagement and awareness raising effects on the general public, though they might be set aside due to organizational budget constraints.

### Strategic economic policies

Confronted with the financial, economic, social and environmental crisis, many territories are putting in place practices that can represent an alternative path that can foster the creation of jobs, ensure rights, accrue the individual and collective awareness on the current economic and social processes. To this end it is fundamental that local institutions and public bodies build a shared strategy in order to support new and existing SSE initiatives. In some areas the research highlights some experiences of genuine cooperation and they should be replicated in all countries as they have already given good evidence of efficiency and effectiveness.





## Critic relationships with the Global South

Finally, when analysing the relationships with the Global South, it can be noted that in spite of the fact that international cooperation is rather developed and common in many countries, also in this area there are scarce experiences of real partnership and sharing between North and South.

Many of the experiences of SSE originated in the South, and they may be imitated and spread in many countries both in the North and South of the world but there is poor consciousness of the transformative potential to share and multiply them according to real partners' needs. These practices also support different local organizations and projects, promoting the creation of new jobs, an entrepreneurial spirit and the recovery of local activities like agriculture tourism, local handcraft. The main social externalities are concerned with job creation or recovery as well as the investment in the rural territory preventing for instance the migration of youth. One of the most noteworthy impacts of their action was the improvement of the use of local resources and the recovery of traditional economic activities rooted in the territories, such as agriculture or fishery. The association operates as a process facilitator, promoting the concept of local identity to stimulate relations between producers and consumers but also between producers. This leads to the an environment that is similar to that of a sharing economy: producers share materials, producers work in small groups to ensure fair prices and promote each other's products.

The recovery of agriculture in a peri-urban territory was very relevant since it has had an immediate impact at the level of job creation, income generation and prevention of unemployment. The consumers gain a new commitment with their community and awareness of the impact of their actions, among others.

## Points of interest

There are different ideas and considerations that can be summarized and highlighted from the research in this area.

### Innovative agriculture

The prevalence and attention to issues related to food allow to develop proposals that are innovative and able to implement visions that go beyond the practice. For example the experience of CSAs and the various proposals for Farmer Market in **Italy, Spain** and **Portugal** can be considered such as models of which we identify as SSE good practices.

Referring to **Italy** and **Spain**, the CSA model aims to deal with these issues in harmony with producers, consumers and nature. CSA is a partnership between farmers and consumers in which the responsibilities, risks and rewards of farming are shared. Arvaia in **Italy** is one of the most interesting good practiced reported. It is an agricultural cooperative formed by citizens and organic farmers. In the Country is the first existing CSA. Unlike other similar cooperatives, Arvaia has been experimenting on a municipal land, that is public. The organization's main goals are: employment, growth of social participation, monitoring and protection of the territory, spread of organic/biodynamic farming, recovery of traditional crops, reduction of market and of monetary exchanges, use of the participated self-certification on products and development of a network of relationships with authorities, associations and individuals in **Italy** and abroad, motivated by the same goals. Some of the most interesting practices reported are also the entities that are creating and organizing a local production network based on environmental-friendly farming practices that present themselves to consumers in farmers' markets. The farmers' markets are public spaces in which multiple farmers gather to sell their farm products directly to consumers. Farmers' markets may be municipally or privately managed and may be seasonal or year-round.

In **Italy** there's a network in Salento Oltre Mercato Salento and in **Spain** we find the Agro-Ecological Agriculture Fair of Zaragoza (MAZ). Those experiences support the short distribution channels in establishing direct relationships between the producer and the consumer. Also numerous activities take place simultaneously to the implementation of the practice: workshops, food tasting and information desks on local products and regional biodiversity. These practices also generate an innovative social approach and political appropriation of local public spaces for socio-ecological transition.

In the meantime a sustainable economic context was created, which allowed many small local and regional producers to become self-employed and who had already started investing in organic farming. It has been shown that a sustainable and ethical production proves successful and it also leads to a preference for organic and natural production models that can change the mainstream production and sales schemes.

These experiences are now building new economic relations based on trust and direct exchanges, thus positively influencing the awareness of one's role as a citizen in protecting the environment and being proactive in local development. This in turn increases the social capital and boosts social innovation processes. People are more and more aware of the differences between agroecology and agribusiness and of the importance of taking a position in this debate, even if that solely translates into conscious purchasing.

## Sustainability of the activities

One of the central objectives of the analysed good practices is the particular attention devoted to the issue of sustainability, not only in economic terms but also at a societal, environmental and communitarian level. Many production processes taken into consideration have embarked on a path of ecological and social conversion, highlighting the need to be oriented towards the satisfaction of basic needs rather than towards profit maximization.

In **France** for example Enercoop is a SCIC (cooperative and participatory association) formed in 2005, which is active across the national territory. Enercoop is the Country's only cooperative supplier of 100% renewable electricity in direct contact with producers. It was formed by a working group, made up of actors of the renewable energy sector, citizens' associations and SSE entities who met in 2004 to invent a new energy model. Greenpeace, Biocoop, Hespul, the CLER, Friends of the Earth and La Nef are the company's founders. Enercoop works with local players to implement production sites (from machine manufacture to assembly) and production phases and at the same time it encourages local employment. Enercoop buys electricity from 14 producers: 7 are hydroelectric producers, 1 is a biomass energy producer, 3 are wind energy producers and 3 are photovoltaic energy producers. The organization's aim is to offer citizens the chance to contribute towards local energy production through a regional network of cooperatives (being created constantly) and become involved in the management of these cooperatives taking a short circuit electricity supply approach. Enercoop Languedoc-Roussillon is raising citizens' awareness through debates, conferences and projections. By proposing non-polluting and cooperative energy through an energy short cycle, Enercoop has a positive environmental impact on the region.

## Reducing, reusing and recycling can help communities

Reducing, reusing, and recycling can help the communities and the environment by saving money, energy, and natural resources. The most effective way to reduce waste is to not create it in the first place.

Making a new product requires a lot of materials and energy, raw materials must be extracted from the earth, and the product must be manufactured then transported to wherever it will be sold. As a result, reduction and reuse are the most effective ways to save natural resources, protect the environment and save money.

In **Cyprus** Anakyklos Perivalontiki is the oldest solidarity organization that is not a cooperative, growing from strength to strength in the last five years. It has also responded to the economic crisis affecting the Country by taking on a much higher

solidarity role in the communities of the Country, often taking the leadership in securing funding drives. In addition, the good practice proposed combines the largest number of the SSE principles as defined by the project. It collects clothes, shoes belts and handbags as well as household textiles and generates revenue from resale and recycling. It is thus in the sector of environmental recycling, but has added social aims in providing basic needs to communities and funding community lead projects.

Another innovative experience in terms of sustainability is UpCycle in **France**, a joint stock company which has obtained the ESUS recognition as a "caring company with social utility". UpCycle proposes to develop an innovative economic model: the circular economy adapted to urban agriculture, designed to meet urban requirements and constraints. The company's business is mainly based on "coffee grounds".

The UpCycle organization harvests the coffee grounds used by Paris automatic coffee machines to recycle them into a special variety of mushroom, the "Pleurotes Monte Cristo". The coffee grounds are sent to the workshops of the Ateliers Sans Frontières (ASF), which employs unqualified people in insertion jobs. Coffee is sorted so as to only save grounds that haven't developed any mushrooms, then woodshavings, mycelium and water are added to them and they are stored in sacks. There are two ways of distributing the products.

The sacks can be sold to professional farmers/gardeners, who can top up their income during off-peak periods by selling the mushrooms. In addition, UpCycle has launched the so-called "boîte à champignons" (mushroom kit), which may be used by anyone to grow mushrooms at home in a box. Once the mushrooms have been cultivated, the remaining sacks are sold as fertiliser for farmers' plantations. The economic cycle is therefore closed in a sustainable way and several social issues are faced and solved along the cycle itself.

## Innovative social inclusion initiatives

In different practices, Social economy and social entrepreneurship are perceived primarily as initiatives to employ disadvantaged people. They are therefore called work integration social enterprises. Social entrepreneurship is considered an instrument of problem-solving in the territory and is not perceived in its global potential.

The attention of many practices to social inclusion is an important factor to be considered, because there are different experiences in **Spain, Italy** and **France** that have a huge impact in supporting disadvantaged groups. All these practices play a unique role in educating and training the territories, which can be taken as an opportunity to link up SSE economy opportunities with territories' demands.

In the food sector we can recall Colombini Farm in **Italy** and Cooperative Terrabona in **Spain**. Their activity is focused on organic farming with the aim of fostering social and labor integration of people with physical disabilities or mental illness or immigrant. For some of them who face daily discrimination because of their nationality or disabilities, it is the first time in their life that they feel like they are not left aside but useful part of “something bigger”. Notwithstanding such positive aspects, the social farm faces daily challenges, mainly from a financial point of view. In order to carry out all the social projects, as mentioned above, apart from the production of organic products, the organizations need to receive enough funds to support a large number of vulnerable people in their process of rehabilitation or integration in the labor market.

## Networking in action: districts and clusters

In this area we find quite interesting examples of organized networks that have also been described as “clusters of solidarity economy” or “districts of solidarity economy”: they are networks of associations, producers and consumers that exchange goods and services in the name of shared principles of solidarity. Their range varies from the informal network to the umbrella organization, they’re active in several sectors but all of them have as their specific objective the introduction in their local territories of closest relationships, partnerships, cooperation between local organizations, groups, local authorities towards innovative forms of local sustainable development.

They may assume different legal structures but all of them share certain characteristics such as a strong promotional focus towards innovative forms of production and consumption and the ability to provide products, care and services that meet the needs of dynamic and innovative small businesses.

In **Italy**, the REES Marche has been established in 2006 by a previous informal structure called Regional Table of Solidarity Economy, in order to allow a progressive definition of the bottom up development conditions for a new economic and social system focused on ecology, common goods, justice, solidarity and a new genuine democracy in the Marche Region. REES is both an association and a network, since it seeks to bring together, in a network of economic and cultural exchanges, so many different actors, so as to achieve the common project of a new and better economy and society. Furthermore, it intends to be a network of networks, since it aims at involving other associative networks (environmental, cultural, economic, voluntary, social promotion, welfare, trade unions, NGOs, etc.) for a positive social transformation. At present, REES Marche has about 200 members, which include many legal entities (companies, cooperatives,

associations, SPGs, not-for-profit organizations and local bodies), and is currently engaged in setting up Solidarity Economy Districts (SEDs) in several areas of the region, through the engagement of economic stakeholders, associations and institutions working in different areas. More specifically, the most significant activities are: networking activities, cultural activities, attempts to set up SEDs and Organic districts, advocacy, sponsorships and promotion of a new economic system.

There is also an informal network found by the research in the Italian territory of Salento connecting several good practices in the agricultural sector. It could be considered as a district of SSE, that connects several initiatives that operate mainly in the agricultural field, thus creating a virtuous cycle going from production to distribution.

The district is composed by: Casa delle Agricolture “Tullio e Gina” - Castiglione d’Otranto and OltreMercatoSalento - Lecce as well as the project Salento Km0 of the Association MEDITFILM in Galatina. This group of organization represents a basic sustainable, ethical and solidarity-based food supply chain, in a common vision of local development based on food sovereignty. Such a network extends over the whole area of the province of Lecce, thus creating strong links within a range of over 60 km, also beyond the province of Lecce itself (known as Salento Area). There’re also elements of networking and clustering in several of the good practices we already listed in the analysis devoted to this area.

They’re pilot experiences in which local entities of several sectors, also from the public dimension and the Local authorities, are implementing activities, opportunities and also policies sharing common principles, namely:

- **Economy must be fair and socially responsible:** individuals belonging to the districts are asked to act according to rules of justice and respect for people (working conditions, health, education, social inclusion, ensuring essential goods and services);
- **Enterprises are encouraged to make equitable distribution of proceeds from economic activities (investment earnings for social workers locally and in the global South), with transparent criteria in pricing for goods and services;**
- **The SSE networks and clusters help in multiplying the contacts and the sharing between different experiences towards a full satisfaction of local needs in protecting the environment;**
- **The SSE networks and clusters experiment and support local initiatives also in forms not yet recognized by laws and regulations to meet basic human needs, to promote human rights and ensure dignified living conditions to all inhabitants.**

# Eastern Europe

## SSE context in the good practices' Countries

The SSE experiences in the area of Eastern Europe are struggling to find a defined space in the economies of their countries. In several of the analyses prepared by researchers, the conceptualization of the SSE suffers a certain marginalization originated maybe from cultural bias tied to perception of these experiences to be in consonance to the "socialist model" that has been strongly questioned since the fall of the Berlin wall. For this reason, the traditional model of "social economy" is what is most widespread in this area: it operates locally on welfare, largely geared to social inclusion. Recent attempts to regulate this sector are important signals to try to define SSE.

**Hungary** for example lacks a law for social enterprises and solidarity economy, but from 2006 until 2013 several decrees have been issued on different sectors: CSOs, voluntary activities carried out with public interest objectives, cooperatives and social cooperatives. Social enterprises can choose from a profit-driven and a not-for-profit legal form; the latter can pursue economic activities only if they do not constitute the main sector of commitment. Social enterprises can obtain various concessions and exemptions from taxation and tariffs.

**Bulgaria** has recently adopted an action plan for the social economy. In October 2014 a declaration was signed which underlined the fact that social enterprises can play an important role in the Country, with a view to sustainable development. Also in 2014 the Road Map "Promoting and developing social entrepreneurship in **Bulgaria**" was developed and a survey is currently being carried out on all active entities working in this field.

In the **Czech Republic** there is a strong presence of centralized social economy initiatives in the city of Prague, created by not-for-profit and social enterprises. They are very diverse and there is not even a clear division in the definition between social enterprises and those focused on solidarity. This diversity is reflected on the different definitions of the SSE entities, partly in the case of not-for-profit organizations and predominantly in the field of social entrepreneurship. It is also reflected in the varying perceptions of their social and economic role and, of course, in the support forms and strategies of their development. In addition, the dividing line between NGOs and social enterprises is not entirely clear.

In the country there are records that list 22,149 not-for-profit enterprises (foundations, pension funds, charitable organizations, associations, legally recognized churches, coordinations of organizations). Two ministries have an important role to promote and support for-profit and not-for-profit social enterprises, which are also sustained by some international banks. Even universities are interested in the sector and carry out research and analysis on various issues. Generally speaking, most social enterprises have the purpose of integrating people with disabilities into employment. Given that social economy and social entrepreneurship in the **Czech Republic** are primarily perceived as initiatives to employ disadvantaged people, they are work integration social enterprises. Social entrepreneurship is perceived as an instrument of solving problems in the country and not as a global approach to economy.

In **Romania** there is a high concentration of these experiences. In the capital Bucharest many social enterprises operate developing numerous interesting experience, while in most rural regions, these experiences are limited.

In **Slovakia** the country's social sector includes trade unions, cooperatives and other forms of social enterprises, support groups, local CBOs, associations of workers in the informal economy, NGOs providing services, finance programs, and many other activities.

In **Croatia** social economy was more typically associated with forms of social enterprises, community associations and 'the third sector'. Solidarity economy isn't a familiar notion to social actors, activists or public. SSE in the Country is only in its infancy, partly in a marginalized position by public authorities, which is evident in national documents, where it is mentioned only in the National Strategy for Creating an Enabling Environment for Civil Society 2006th to 2011th. The process towards a new National Strategy for development of social entrepreneurship 2014-2020 is very slow, and the weakness of the sector emerges from answers gathered during interviews conducted with stakeholders from Dubrovnik Neretva county. The only form of social entrepreneurship which has an institutional and legislative framework is the cooperatives scheme that is acknowledged in the Cooperatives Act. In order to achieve the potential development of social entrepreneurship, a legal and institutional framework

should be defined for social enterprises and solidarity economy and combined with the above-mentioned National Strategy so as to give a 'major boost' to the development of SSE in Croatia.

Also in **Slovenia** the definition "social economy" is little known, while the general public is more acquainted with the notion of "social entrepreneurship". Until January 2015, Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Affairs and Equal opportunities was in charge of the sector, while currently the competence is in the hands of the Ministry of economic development and technology. Official documents refer to the initiatives in this domain as

*"an innovative form of entrepreneurship with high sense of responsibility to society and the people. For social entrepreneurship the motives of business are aimed in solving social, economic, environmental and other problems of society in an innovative way. The primary purpose of these alternative forms of entrepreneurship is the market functioning while taking into account the principles of social entrepreneurship: creating jobs for vulnerable groups of people and carrying out socially useful activities. Like classical companies, social enterprises operate in the market, with the difference that the profit generally is not shared among owners (and workers), but is returned to back the operation of the company. Social entrepreneurship is a connection factor, as it encourages people's involvement and volunteer work, and in this way strengthens solidarity in society."*

## Data analysis

In this section, some quantitative and qualitative indicators have been developed from the information gathered in the research reports, so as to provide the reader with comparable data on the identified good practices. The qualitative indicators are based on some shared SSE criteria: environmental impact, social impact, participation, self-management/management share, networking ability and attention to communication and advocacy. With respect to quantitative indicators, the analysis concerns SSE sectors and activities, estimates of the number of people directly or indirectly involved in the practices (employees, members, volunteers), of the turnover generated by the activities carried out and considerations on the legal form/informal structure taken by the practices. Through these indicators it is possible to build an effective monitoring and evaluation system for the practices considered, in order to not only create a snapshot of the current data but also to find ways to strengthen the process towards a greater efficacy of the analysed components.

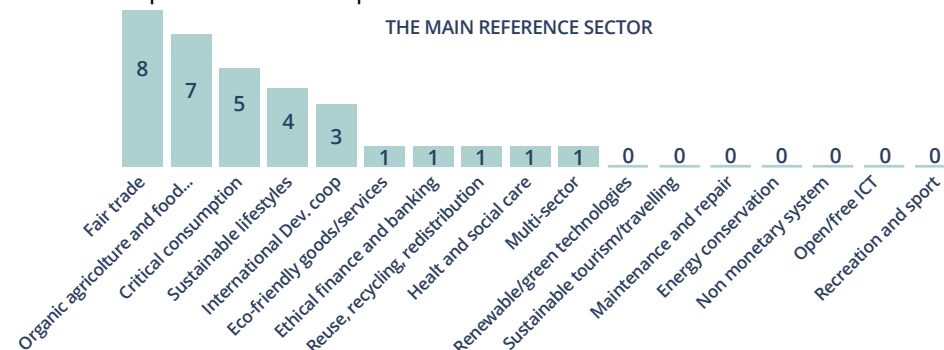


## Sectors

The 11 selected good practices deal with different sectors or areas of competences of SSE. A first result shown by the analysis is the prevalence of practices identified in **food sector** in particular **Eco-friendly** goods/services (5 practices) and **Fair Trade sector** (2 practices). Among the other sectors, we find redistribution, reuse and recycling (2 practices) and one practice in the field of Sustainable lifestyles and organic agriculture and food sovereignty. It is interesting to highlight that the most part of the selected experiences are focused on the catering/food services that allows other sectors of SSE to be involved, also if there are concerns regarding some weakness in agricultural production and farming experiences carried out by SSE entities.



By analysing the different activities of the identified practices we find that the main reference sectors in SSE of this area are: **eco-friendly goods** and **services** with a strong call to action towards the commitment to **sustainable lifestyles** and **critical consumption**. Even Fair Trade and the agricultural and organic entities are well represented, along with the experiences of reuse and recycling; some attention is also given to sustainable tourism. There are no experiences related to a direct action of international solidarity cooperation to ethical finance and renewable energy. This categorization is clearly limited and synthetic, given that there are practices that implement activities in several of these fields.



Attempts of interconnection between SSE organizations are not experimented in this area to make them more resilient. These seem to be some of the most urgent objectives to share for SSE organizations in the area. This research is expected to work as enabling factor for a more collaborative and shared operating mode to make them achieve greater social impacts. In fact the only attempt to operate in a systematic way can be partly in practices related to eco-friendly goods and services sector.

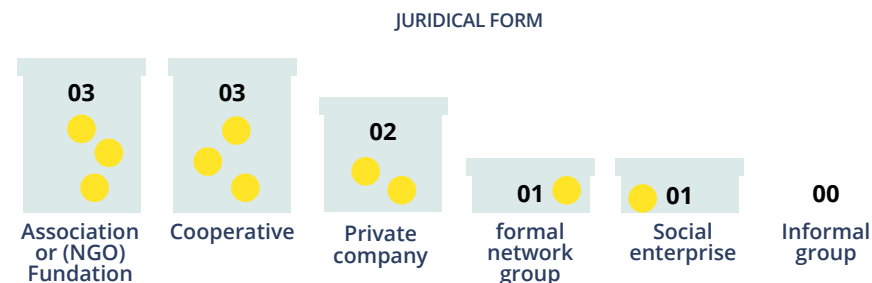


When analysing the traditional economic functions carried out by the selected practices, a preponderance of the functions related to **trade and services** (43%) can be noted, followed by functions of production and processing (35%), consumption (13%) and distribution (9%). This fact is closely related to the prevalence of the food sector as it previously appeared.

## Participation

The analysis of Eastern Europe practices make emerge in different ways the engagement of thousands of people in SSE, and shows their great ability for engagement. They're building up a real alternative economy able to create employment; to guarantee rights, to expand individual and collective awareness on current social and economic processes; to think of a community made of citizens and people and not of consumers, clients and producers. In total there are more than 500 people involved in various ways, while there are more than 150 people directly or indirectly employed by SSE entities.

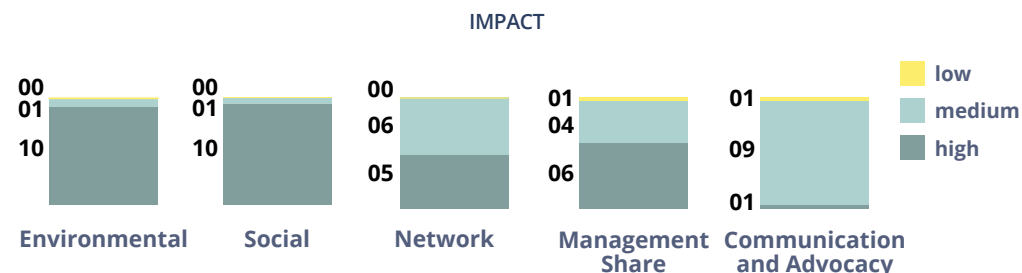
The capacity of engagement and job creation is different for the SSE entities: for instance the Bulgarian Food Bank (BFB) Foundation has given support to 22,500 people. With respect to the legal form of these organizations, it is interesting to observe that the majority of the practices are **Associations, NGOs or Foundations** (3) and **Cooperatives** (3) also private enterprises (2) and only one social enterprise. In addition, there are also on cluster or networks (1 with different forms).



## Impact

As already explained for the North and Central Europe area, the practices of SSE are generally oriented towards collective interest objectives. Most part of these experiences as well is focused on the creation and the development of initiatives dedicated to the production and exchange of goods and services and they work according to the principles of cooperation, reciprocity, responsible subsidiarity, sustainability and energetic-environmental compatibility. In particular, if we look at the practices identified with the research, it is possible to qualitatively assess some impact indicators related to some criteria.

The following graph shows the impact of some values within the practices. For example we can observe that the high value given to the social and environmental dimension in most part of the analysed practices.



In this area a significant environmental and social impact of the practices is to highlight. Notably, in the most part of the experiences the two aspects are carried on simultaneously and combined in different ways but of at the highest level of their effectiveness. If the practices show also an impact in networking and self-management, a greater weakness is to be noted in their competencies on advocacy and communication, that are considered moderately important by the organizations that have been analysed. These indications should be taken into account in assessing possible supporting and/or training action at a later stage of the project or in its proceedings.

## Turnover

Regarding the turnover generated by these practices, it is only possible to make overall evaluations because the collected figures are not complete or adequately defined. Anyway, we are talking about an economic total value of around more than 2 million EUR. This is the area that registers the lowest economic volume for the SSE sector in percentage terms. Also in this case it is appropriate to differentiate between practices whose turnovers are of considerable size, like that of the Bulgarian Food Bank (BFB).

## Solutions against the economic crisis

In terms of solutions to the ongoing economic and social crisis, the role of SSE in this area is played in different directions. In one hand, the role of the social and solidarity economy entities consists in the direct fulfilment of their missions, i.e. social and environmental objectives achieved through their not-for-profit and/or business activities. Nevertheless, the social and solidarity economies' biggest entities also play a key supporting role in contributing to a further development of SSE organizations at local level. It includes various forms of financing and advisory services, sponsorships, legislative and political patronage, tutoring and, last but not least, research, education and raising of public awareness. The attention of many practices to social inclusion is an important factor of distinctiveness of the area.

In **Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia** and **Croatia** there are several experiences that achieve a relevant impact in supporting disadvantaged people. They promote employment, as well as working in education and training according to a scheme of intervention that should be taken as a model to be replicated to tailor SSE activities along the needs of the territories. Recalling the migration emergency raising in Europe, a mention is needed on the SSE practice promoted in **Slovenia** and called SKUHNA or "Slovenian World Cuisine". It is an innovative project of social enterprise, which involve migrants as well as refugees. It is meant to contribute to the improvement of social conditions of migrants and refugees, while enriching the Slovenian society. The idea is based on the connection between people around a basic need: food and nutrition. Also on the issue of migrants and refugees an important role is played by the Bulgarian Food Bank Foundation. Together with its classic approach to ensure care and food support to migrants, it creates a link between the food industry and the organizations providing food support inside and outside the shelters for refugees. In 2014 over 3,480 refugees were assisted, including over 150 families housed in external addresses.

## South-North exchanges

East Europe is one of the areas that presented less direct relations with the Global South. There are few SSE practices that have projects connected with the reality of the Global South as well as development cooperation projects.

Fair Trade is a model for a different relationship with many countries of the South, in two experiences located in the **Czech Republic** (Fair & Bio Pražírna) and in **Slovakia** (Lyra Chocolate sro) who have as core business the transformation of Fair Trade commodities such as cocoa and coffee. The coffee beans come from Latin America and Africa and their countries of origin are Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras and Uganda, while the cocoa come from family farmers in Colombia and the Dominican Republic. Through Fair Trade it is possible to combat global poverty, given the decisive role of conscious consumers whose purchasing decisions directly affect the working and living conditions of producers in the Global South. Thanks to its vision and objectives, Fair Trade can be considered as a bridge between SSE and Development Cooperation.

Even the Slovenian of **Slovenia** SKUHNA or "Slovenian World Cuisine" is somehow an attempt to build a bridge between migrants and refugees and local communities. Successful integration of migrants into their host societies is a key to maximizing the benefits of immigration. Considering that chefs and waiters participating to the projects are migrants and refugees coming from different corners of the world, Skuhna proposes a variety of dishes typical of Central and South America, Asia, and Africa.

They work on cultural terms, but also to ensure the concrete value of their job and the flow of remittances they generate, to establish multiple bonds of cooperation and solidarity between their countries of origin and the communities in which they actually live.

# Critical aspects

## Defining SSE

According to the concept adopted in SSE, researchers report that in the area the definition 'social and solidarity economy' It is not used at all. Terms such as 'social economy' and 'social enterprise' are recognized, are perceived as relevant and deeply understood.

The social economy in this area is commonly considered as a "third sector" of the formal economy, complementing the "first sector" (private/profit-oriented) and the "second sector" (public/planned). The third sector includes cooperatives, mutuals, associations, and foundations. These entities are collectively organized and oriented around social aims that are prioritized above profits, or return to shareholders. The primary concern of those entities, as societies of people and not of capitals, is not to maximize profits but to achieve social goals (which does not exclude to make a profit, which is necessary for reinvestment).

## Communication and advocacy

As we have previously noted in qualitative figures, communication and advocacy activities carried out by some of the practices selected show the weakness of such dimension, though approaches and commitment vary significantly from practice to practice. As a matter of fact, some of the experiences considered implement communication and advocacy activities as market positioning strategies in the local SSE. However, such field of action should be greatly enhanced when the logic of solidarity economy must grow large enough to change the national economic picture. In this field of activity, interaction between local authorities, universities and public organizations for SMEs and individual reality of SSE are critical.

Therefore it will be difficult for, a movement, company or organization to grow respecting a sustainable model and to achieve a notable dimension. This may result in the creation of numerous small businesses without a common network which links them to each other. This is why it's crucial to connect initiatives that are working successfully, to make them share good practices of management and use new technologies to overcome geographical hurdles.

## Strategic economic policies

In most countries in this area we cannot refer to a public policy articulated according to the needs of different sectors of the SSE. In some countries specific measures have recently been taken to regulate and support SSE sectors and specific activities.

A first indication for the immediate future is that it would be very useful for Governments and local authorities to draft and share a public regulation able to stimulate the creation of new SSE businesses and, on the other hand, to encourage and sustain the existing activities that very often are original and interesting so they could be immediately replicated in other areas and other countries. Several of the analysed experiences already provide valuable solutions to social issues to be addressed and display ways best suited to solve the different problems in the territories.

A possible suggestion arising from the research is to elaborate a regulatory framework for SSE that takes into account the existing and potential activities, looking very carefully at the ongoing experiences in the other European countries with similar cultural traditions. Valuable measures could be elaborated on the job creation for disadvantaged people in activities related to environmental sustainability and migrations.

Those measures could put European countries in direct contact with countries that are still striving to find their own sustainable development strategy. Under this legal framework direct support could be offered to early stages of networking and supply chains creation for SSE enterprises to link up the existing good practices encouraging their multiplication and horizontal integration.

Finally, it is obvious that these regulations will actually be approved only if SSE entities will exert appropriate pressure in some sectors that are already considered necessary and urgent for the entire planet as all the experiences that pay attention to environmental issues and social inclusion.



## Points of interest

There are different ideas and considerations that emerge from the analysis of the practices identified in this region and listed in the research.

### Innovative and eco-friendly productive activities

Several innovative practices in the area are related to eco-friendly food and goods production as social development enabling factor. The “Bakery Social Club” in **Bulgaria** and “Concordia Bakery” in **Romania** in addition to producing bread and bakery products organize cultural events, implement social and educational programs for youth and adults in needs or not. These experiences promote the socio- professional integration of the young people into their communities in different ways, trying to source as much as possible of local raw materials (more than 80% is coming from local market), thus reducing the carbon footprint, by transporting the materials from/to very close destinations. In this way also the amount of greenhouse gases emissions from transportation is limited. In addition, they are working for the revival of cultural and culinary traditions of the region, offering quality and healthy products. With the added value of those produces, customers consciously participate in the creation of conditions for a dignified life of disadvantaged people and contribute to the general welfare of the local community. The “Bread Therapy” emerges as a relevant but basic tool for social change. Therefore, the economic sustainability of those businesses is ensured by the production of bread, a product required every day and the recovery of old recipes, which makes it attractive to people with middle and higher incomes, connoisseurs of traditions.

In the same way the ROH cooperative in **Czech Republic** with its café shop and Skuhna or “Slovenian World Cuisine” in **Slovenia** feed innovative processes of social gathering, through their alternative food services creating a space where people from different social groups could meet, share their ideas and debate about national and global issues.

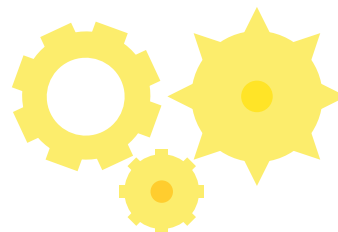
Similar examples are Szimpla Farmers’ Market in **Hungary**: a hugely popular Fair Trade market in the centre of Budapest, providing opportunity for local farmers to sell their products at affordable stand rent rates and for locals to be able to buy producers’ goods. The project’s main goal was to provide a stable and low-cost opportunity for local small scale producers to sell their products and to promote short food chains and local, sustainable farming and last but not least to provide customers with reliable food source.

## Reducing, reusing, and recycling can help communities

Reduce, reuse and recycle - all help to cut down on the amount of waste we throw away. They conserve natural resources, landfill space and energy and saving money. Reducing, reusing, and recycling is the best way to help the environment. A recyclable product is turned back into a raw form that can be used to create a new and different product. The collection and sale of goods retrieved from the urban waste constitutes a sort of “natural” social protection measure and a source of income for many brackets of society that are marginalized in the labor market, especially in periods of economic hardships. Moreover, the recycling of used objects contributes to the decrease of waste disposals, thus diminishing the environmental crises in the territories.

In this area there some excellent initiatives which show elements of social innovation are Social cooperative Prijateljica in **Croazia** and Ateliere fără Frontiere in **Romania**. These two experiences address the issue of social inclusion and the environment, encouraging and promoting the employment of disabled people and other socially excluded people through the production and sale of products made of clay, plaster, recycled paraffin and textiles or by collecting, reusing, recycling electrical and electronic equipment. In this way the cooperatives are actively contributing to the sustainable development of local communities, environmental protection and poverty reduction, and improving the self-esteem and quality of life of people with disabilities and their families.

With regard to food waste we must be aware that most people don’t realize how much food they throw away every day — from uneaten leftovers to spoiled produce. About 95%t of the food we throw away ends up in landfills or combustion facilities. In 2015 we disposed globally more than 37 million tons of food waste. Once in landfills, food breaks down to produce methane, a potent greenhouse gas which contributes to climate change. One of the selected good practice - the Bulgarian Food Bank Foundation - works to reduce such food waste using it as a development enabler.



## Sustainability of the activities

As highlighted in the previous area, all the experiences analysed and listed in the research have an important impact on global as well as local sustainability. Most of these realities, in fact, are environmentally, socially and economically sustainable. They don't use chemical substances, genetically modified organisms, are small scale sized and not oriented towards profit maximization, but the satisfaction of people's and nature's needs.

Urban agriculture is promoting a strong rediscovery of self- organization and self-management and, these new initiatives also represent a strong element of social inclusion. Szimpla Farmers' Market in Hungary is a great example of cross-sectoral cooperation promoting SSE that spread a strong message to other actors emphasizing the advantages of the participatory approach. The project actively contributes to the sustainable development of small-scale farmers and local communities, promotes the notion of short food chains and local, sustainable farming, and provides customers with reliable food source. Throughout all these, environmental protection and poverty reduction are also fostered and cultivated.

Selected examples make emerge that SSE initiatives requires a high level of political maturity and capacity of vision and strategy.

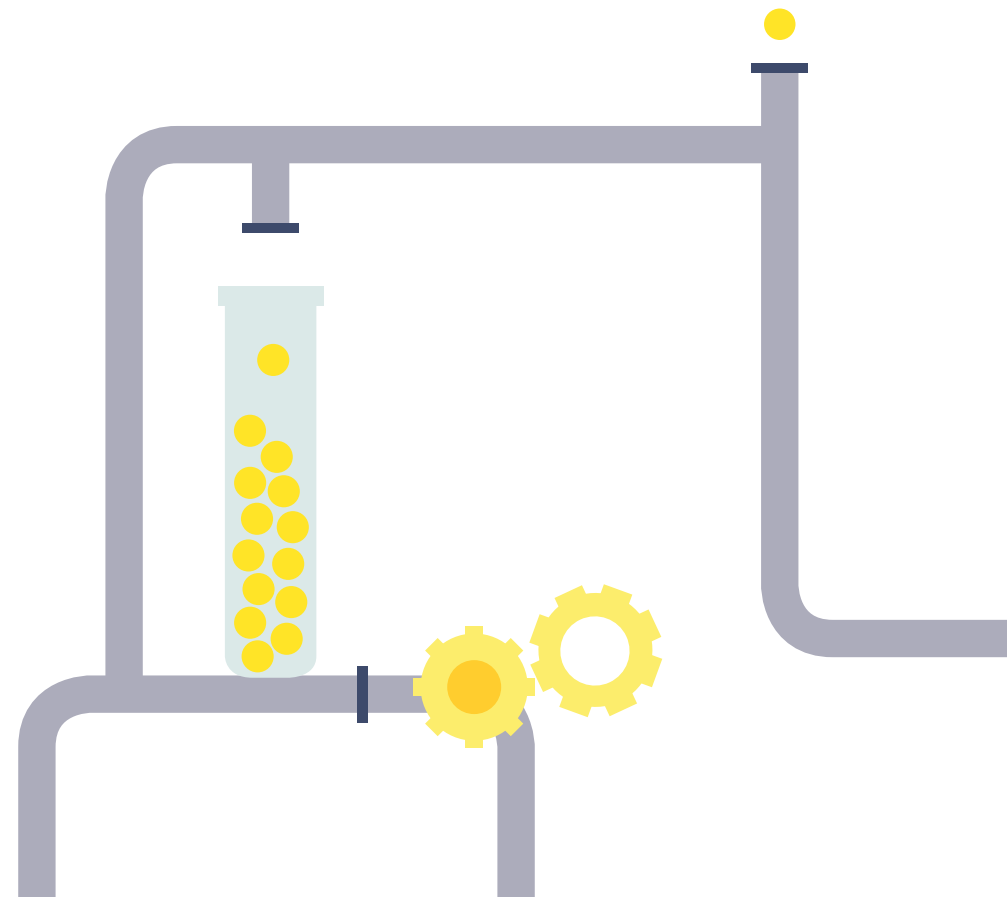
## Fair and solidarity trade and social inclusion

In this area the role of Fair Trade as highlight in the practices from **Czech Republic** (Fair & Bio pražírna) and in **Slovakia** (Lyra Chocolate sro) that are focused on Fair Trade produce and transformation, as well as in social entrepreneurship. With the employment of people with disabilities, the Fair & Bio Cooperative is an unique example of good practice in this geographic area.

Its conscious connection with the countries of the Global South makes it exceptional given the current prevailing conditions in the **Czech Republic** where the social enterprises feel responsible only for the development of the territory where they operate. By promoting the creation of networks and organization between small- scale local producers, placing a higher value on work and environmental protection and appealing to consumers to make responsible purchasing choices part of daily life, Fair Trade gives a more supportive basis to the relations involved in production, sales and consumption.

It is important to note that after more than forty years since the first experience, this sector is still being expanded and in different countries where it now

represents a new formula of cooperation with the southern hemisphere (often articulated and enriched in different countries). In this way intra-national relationships can be established, so as to widen the bands of solidarity within the international trade flows.



# World area

## SSE context in the good practices' Countries

This area includes countries very far from each other and with different cultural traditions, so even when some economic projects may seem similar, they can have little comparable content. For example, in Latin America the concept of "solidarity economy" implies a different perspective facing "social economy" that is the mainstream definition shared in Europe to define similar activities. While the European paradigm focuses on organizational forms (cooperatives, mutuals, associations), the Latin America one focuses on substance, namely on how different actors can be engaged in the economy. The solidarity economy, in this perspective, is an alternative form of economy in theory and practices strongly associated with social and economic change.

This particular vision had a special boost when **Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador** and **Venezuela** were governed by forces closely linked to popular movements. Bolivia seems to be rather organized and with a strong institutional presence on the SSE as a whole. There are community economic activities recognized by the State (in particular belonging to Oecas and Oecom, the two main farmers' organizations), while data collection and analysis, industry policies and processes are regularly checked and multiannual plans support interventions and regulation are often implemented. In **Brazil**, one of the most active and advanced countries with respect to the SSE, the first practices of SSE already started at the beginning of the '80s, while the sector has received political attention already in the beginning of '90s, but only in the mid-'90s solidarity economy was explicitly recognized and the recovery of enterprises began to multiply, as businesses directly managed by the employees. One of the most effective support entity that works also as coordination is the Brazilian Forum of Solidarity Economy (FBES), a space promoted by civil society with the support of public funding that connects producers, enterprises, associations, NGOs and their networks.

**Brazil** is the country that provides the most various amount of public measures to promote solidarity economies. The first experience took place as initiative of University of Porto Alegre with the support of local and national Governments. In 2004, the Government of Lula Da Silva created the Secretariat of solidarity economy, dependent on the Ministry of labor. This secretariat was created with the objective to "promote the strengthening and dissemination of economic

solidarity, through integrated policies, aiming at the generation of employment and income, social inclusion and the promotion of fair development." Its work is to manage enterprises, business associations, trade fairs, solidarity and Fair Trade's distribution networks. More than 1 million workers currently belong to self-managed enterprises. The mapping exercise carried out by the Sub-ministry for SSE reported a total of 33,518 SSE enterprises in the Country between the years of 2004 and 2013<sup>13</sup>.

In **Uruguay**, SSE movements have had a strong boost after the financial crisis that hit the country in 2001. SSE networks generally consist of informal groups or small cooperatives working mainly on handicrafts or organic farming but there are also very active on responsible tourism and Fair Trade. SSE in the Country is also populated by CSOs such as associations and NGOs and universities that support and promote these experiences in the territories. A mapping exercise launched by the University of the Republic has been recently completed and identified around 600 practices of solidarity economy (60% of them informal, 40% collective) involving more than 5,000 people. There are several opportunities for discussion with national and local institutions and in some regions there are local governments that have a specific administrative department to support SSE. The first store selling organic products was opened in 2005, in 2007 the first shop for Fair Trade items was opened then the following year the national coordination for solidarity economy was created with the task of promoting events and SSE markets across the country. Today the movement is somewhat reduced and is more focused in organic farming and responsible consumption. In recent years the issue of self-management has once again become a hot topic for movements in the country.

In the Asian continent there is a huge variety of experiences and SSE movements are often little known and strongly localized. In **India** the SSE organizations, due to the Principles that they uphold, have a great value and relevance for large segments of deprived populations with scarce access to resources, particularly capitals, allowing them to become owners of their small scale businesses. Very often through collective participation they gain more leverage facing

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13 Secretaria Nacional de Economia Solidária (SENAES), La Economía Solidaria en Brasil: un análisis de datos a nivel nacional (2013)

institutions, and thanks to cooperatives and networks they ensure equity and fair management share to the members through their participatory governance systems. Social and solidarity activities include nearly 300 million people, mainly organized in cooperatives, two thirds of them active in agriculture (largely in producing sugar and dairy products) and with a limited presence of women. In the '90s, following the global dynamics of economic and finance liberalization, a bill has been introduced with a focus on the cooperative sector, including those entities which may be related to solidarity economy even if not specifically defined. In the country there's also an intense activity in the fields of Fair Trade and organic farming.

In **Malaysia**, the broad spectrum of SSE is divided into four sectors: cooperatives, social enterprises, ethical finance and CSOs. The latest ones carry out economic activities very often to be self-sustainable. In general, the initiatives that belong to the Fair Trade sector do not feel themselves as part of a more inclusive movement. The field of initiatives of ethical finance and mutuals recognized by a national register counts around 3800 units, but there are very few figures on the specific activities carried out. It can be noted that CSOs, NGOs and not-for-profit entities are expanding despite delays due to some restrictive measures that have been introduced lately. In the African continent over the last twenty years there has been a growth of the experiences and the impact of SSE.

In **Mauritius** there is no specific legal or popular definition that can suggest the presence of the concept of SSE. This area is poorly known so is possible to encounter some really interesting experiences that unfortunately are not identified or recognized so there's no specific data collection. SSE in the Country is composed of three main sectors: cooperatives, CSOs that run economic activities and not-for-profit companies. More than 30 different socio-economic activities are provided by cooperatives. Cooperatives in **Mauritius** and Rodrigues consist of 95,012 members grouped in 1,052 cooperatives societies with a turnover of around 5,5 billion INR (more than 70 million EUR). The main economic activities undertaken by cooperatives societies are production and marketing of sugar cane (10% of national production), potatoes cultivation (45%), onions (70%), fresh vegetables (80%) livestock, fish, bus owners, consumer stores, handicraft, credit and savings. Although there are numerous CSOs and Charitable institutions that support some form of economic activities such as patchwork production (Magic Fingers Association), the production of Greetings Cards (Centre d'Accueil de Terre Rouge), the production of handicrafts (Medine Horizons), and other fundraising events (CARITAS and other NGOs) there is no systematic recording and statistical reporting on the proceeds of such activities

and their use. Interesting experiences are emerging in this region about cooperatives operating in the agricultural sector that are initiating processes of conversion to organic methods also under the influence of the Fair Trade importers that increasingly require organic certification of agricultural products.

Regarding **Palestine**, SSE experiences have their roots in the economy of resistance mechanisms of employment and self-employment. A definite vision of the SSE in the Country has not been yet conceptualized. Today, the Palestinian society and economy is characterized by chronic political instability, economic dependency from the occupier and international donors. A deterioration of solidarity and social values and pattern is also noticeable, together with a lack of effective public policies to face the structural problems affecting economic sectors and the labor market. Despite these trends and overall situation, some good practices can still be identified on the field and they represent a significant and interesting attempt to resist and create alternative ways of production, engagement, job creation, consumption, investment, etc. Some examples are: not-for-profit organizations or NGOs working in capacity building to empower the role of cooperatives and informal groups operating in organic agriculture.

In **Tunisia**, the experiences that can be referred to SSE are very limited but there is a structured civil society that is active in different field related to some of SSE values. According to a recent research (March 2015), over 18,000 organizations are carrying out SSE work in local communities, although not all have to be considered active. There are also at least 80 international NGOs, which realize projects and which also denounce excessive dependence on foreign donors, striving at the same time to create stable jobs and to spread job opportunities in the contexts in which they are engaged. There is also a considerable number of informal groups, mostly active in rural or suburban areas and inland regions, which it is estimated could even represent more than a third of the local economy. The most represented sectors are trade, crafts, agriculture and traditional gastronomy. These entities don't have a legal recognition, but still ensure a continuity with traditional local solidarity practices. Finally, a 2005 law is protecting mutual activities for agriculture services businesses.

The economy of **Mozambique**, a country situated on Africa's south-east coast, is largely based on agriculture. It is considered one of the least developed countries in the world despite abundance of natural resources. In addition to agricultural resources, such as land, forest and water, it also possesses minerals, for example coal, natural gas and graphite. Minerals, however, have little contributed to the overall wealth of the wider population

as their extraction would first require a considerably large investment in the country's infrastructure. Agriculture plays a prominent role; it is the mainstay of the Country's economy. At present, agriculture and fishing make up around 25% of the country's GDP. At the same time, roughly 80% of working age Mozambicans are employed in agriculture, the vast majority of them in small-scale farming, cultivating land not bigger than one to two hectares per family. These small-scale farms produce almost all of **Mozambique's** fresh produce.

A good part of the SSE experiences are present in this sector, mainly represented by the cooperatives that are fighting against the policies of industrialization and standardization of the agricultural sector, but the potential pathways towards creating a sustainable agricultural model and improving people's access to food are very different, and people's views on the subject vary widely. Whilst the government believes that agricultural corporations need to play a stronger role, farmers' organizations and cooperative associations are demanding an improved political framework and more support for small-scale producers. What is at stake is nothing less than the future of agriculture in the Country.

That is why Mozambican NGOs and farmers' associations such as UNAC (União Nacional dos Camponeses) are extremely critical of the PNISA and the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition. They propose models that bring small-scale agriculture and the strengthening of regional economic circulation to the fore in order to make food sovereignty a reality.

## Data analysis

In this section, some quantitative and qualitative indicators have been developed from the information gathered in the research reports, so as to provide the reader with comparable data on the identified good practices. The qualitative indicators are based on some shared SSE criteria: environmental impact, social impact, participation, self-management/management share, networking ability and attention to communication and advocacy.

With respect to quantitative indicators, the analysis concerns SSE sectors and activities, estimates of the number of people directly or indirectly involved in the practices (employees, members, volunteers), of the turnover generated by the activities carried out and considerations on the legal form/informal structure taken by the practices.

Through these indicators it is possible to build an effective monitoring and evaluation system for the practices considered, in order to not only create a snapshot of the current data but also to find ways to strengthen the process towards a greater efficacy of the analysed components.

## Sectors

The 9 selected good practices deal with different sectors or areas of competences of SSE. A first result shown by this research is the prevalence of practices identified in the **agricultural/food sector** ( 4 practices ) and eco-friendly craftsmanship (2 practices ) with respect to the others. Among the other sectors, we find reuse and recycling, sustainable tourism/travelling and multi-sector services.



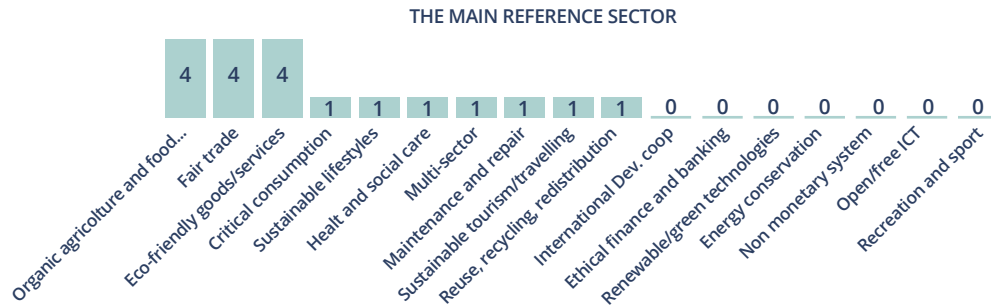
In this area, the agricultural sector remains an integral part of inclusive development which is more effective in poverty reduction compared to other sectors. However, there is an increased concern that the conventional practice of agriculture is causing soil and water pollution, while emitting a significant amount of greenhouse gas, reducing biodiversity, and bypassing poor farmers, particularly in rained areas.

Moreover, the quality and safety of food produced under conventional agriculture are increasingly being questioned by consumers. Accordingly, a fundamental transformation toward alternative production systems that are more environment and climate-friendly, inclusive, and producing safer food is urgently needed. Among the alternative agriculture schemes, organic agriculture has received much attention as the sector has been growing at double-digit rates in the last ten years. The experiences have emerged in this area give clear indications in line with these requirements.

Many are the processes of transformation towards organic cultivation and there are increasingly community experiences based on the quality of the food and the direct relationships between agricultural producers and consumers. As for the experiences based on craft activities and the reuse and recycling of raw materials, productions oriented towards essential consumption other than food, their establishment is more due to the reduction of mining activities

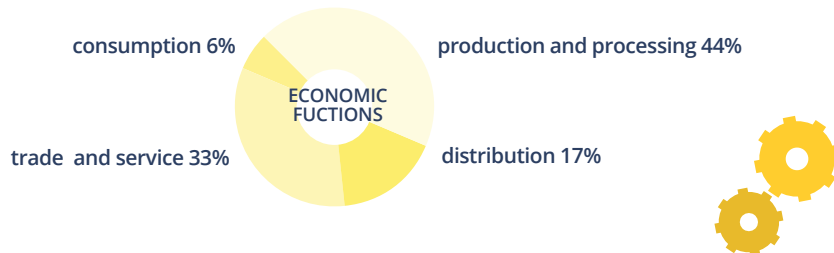
and the protection and creation of jobs, especially important in recently industrialized areas.

By analysing the different activities of the selected practices, we find that the main reference sectors are: **organic agricultural and food, Fair Trade and eco-friendly craftsmanship**, followed by critical consumption, reuse and recycling and multi-sector. There are also experiences in production sectors (of goods and services). This categorization is clearly limited and synthetic, given that there are practices that implement activities in several of these fields.



Given the heterogeneity of the contexts in which the identified good practices operate, it isn't possible to make generalizations regarding their ability to interconnect systematically. In countries where forms of SSE have been existing for many decades, i.e. in Latin America, the presence of districts and other methods of networking are well established. On the contrary, in the African and Asian contexts, where SSE is somewhat of a newer concept, attempts to create connections are often at a more preliminary stage.

When analysing the traditional economic functions carried out by the selected practices, a preponderance of the functions related to **trade and services** (44%) is noticeable, followed by the functions of production and processing (17%), consumption (33%) and distribution (6%). In this area there is a greater attention given to the production and processing functions that are more predominant than in the other analysed geographical areas.

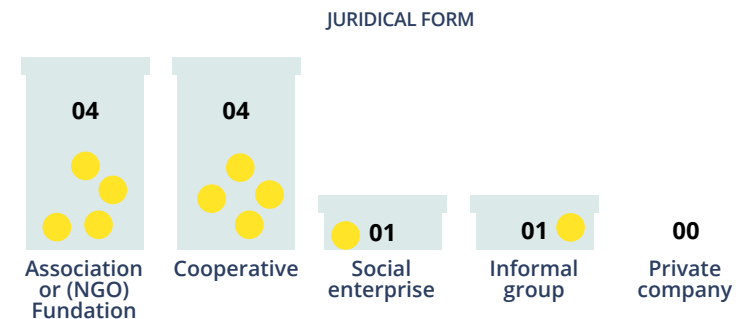


## Participation

The analysed practices from America Latina, Africa, Asia involve in different ways thousands of people, which show their great ability for engagement and, at the same time the ability to build a real alternative economy, to create employment, guarantee rights, expand individual and collective awareness on current social and economic processes, think of a community made of citizens and people and not of consumers, clients and producers. In total there are more than 100,000 people involved in various ways, while there are estimated more than 558 people employed directly or indirectly by them.

It is one of the analysed area with higher number of actors involved, but the capacity for engagement and jobs creation are different: there are realities with few work units employed, while there are other that can involve several employees or members, like the Petite Savanne Cooperative Credit Society that employs 274 people or the Central Cooperative that employs 150 people.

Another example is the organization **Mozambique's** National Peasants' Union with 100,000 members who are organized into roughly 2,500 farmers' associations or cooperatives; this case has a strong influence on the overall numbers of people involved as the nature of this popular movement among the farmers has encouraged the formation of a wide base of support. With respect to the legal form of these organizations, it is interesting to observe that the majority of the practices are **Cooperatives** (4), **Associations, NGOs** or **Foundations** (4) also social enterprises (1). In addition, there is also the informal Tunisian group selected as the territory's good practice.

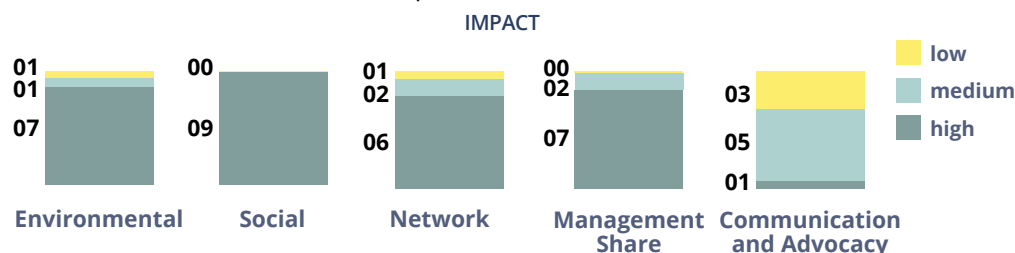


## Impact

As we know these practices of SSE are oriented towards collective interest objectives. The promotion of the relationships between different entities, a fair allocation of resources, the respect and the safeguard of the environment, the pursuit of social aims are features that are present in all the experiences analysed. These experiences are therefore focused on the creation and the growth of initiatives dedicated to the production and exchange of goods and services and they work according to the principles of cooperation, reciprocity, responsible subsidiarity, sustainability and energetic- environmental compatibility. In particular, if we look at the practices identified with this research, it is possible to qualitatively assess some impact indicators of some criteria.

The following graph shows the impact of some values within the practices. For example we can observe the high value given to the social and environmental dimension in most of the analysed practices. It is important to stress the closer attention paid to the management aspect, which translates into participatory decision-making processes, exchanging of views and democratic governance. All this practices try to improve collective initiatives and to the ability to work in cooperation among different organization, even if currently such aspect is already given greater attention than in other geographical areas.

More generally, with regard to the impact of the practices even here there is a relative weakness in the ability of advocacy and communication, it can still be noted that several of these experiences are devoting more attention to these activities, in particular with the aim of defending the rights of people involved in them, or to influence national policies in their fields of interest so as to enhance their social and environmental impact.



## Turnover

Regarding the income generated by these practices, it is only possible to make estimates because the figures are not complete or adequately defined, but as a whole we are talking about an economic total turnover of more than 4 million

EUR. This is the area with the highest economic volume encountered- Also in this case it is appropriate to differentiate between practices whose turnovers are of considerable size, like for Indian case of Central Cooperative that accounts for 3,900,000 EUR .

Also we cannot consider in this economic volume the contribution of the **Mozambique's** National Peasants Union, that with 2,500 farmers associations or cooperatives definitely generates an economic matter of considerable importance.

## Solutions against the economic crisis

In the Global South a growing amount of working-age people find a job in the informal economy, often under of precarious employment conditions and acute decent work deficits. The prevalence of informal employment in many parts of the world not only affects the current living standards of the population but is also a severe constraint that prevents households and economic units from increasing their productivity and finding a route out of poverty. According to the most recent estimates, non- agricultural employment in the informal economy constitutes as much as 82% of total employment in South Asia, 66% in sub-Saharan Africa, 65% in East and South-East Asia (excluding China) and 51% in Latin America. In general, the role and development of the SSE in these countries have been vital in order to protect most part of them against poverty, urban marginalization, high unemployment and worse environmental impact of the crisis.

SSE offers means to tackle vulnerable employment and to bridge the transition from the informal to the formal economy under conditions of decent work. Within an enabling policy and institutional environment, SSE can play a key role in realizing the goal of decent work, along with its constituent elements of employment generation, social dialogue and labor standards associated with both workers' rights and social protection.

The organization of informal economy workers and producers in various forms of association and cooperative can play an important role in addressing market failures. Such organizations can facilitate access to finance, market information, inputs, technology, support services and markets and enhance the capacity of producers to negotiate better prices and income. SSE initiatives can reduce power and information asymmetries within labor and product markets and enhance the level and regularity of incomes.

This is particularly important in sectors such as food and agriculture, which experience global competition and insecurity. The low capital requirements needed to form certain types of cooperative can be beneficial for informal workers seeking to engage in enterprise activities. From a general point of view, cooperatives are among the largest employers in many countries in both the

global North and South. Solidarity microfinance institutions and self-help groups often facilitate access to those resources that are essential for starting and developing income generating-activities. Solidarity economy, for instance, boomed in the '90s in Latin America when those countries were facing economic crisis and high unemployment rates. People looking for alternative income sources began to cluster into groups, cooperatives and associations. The model is not well known but awareness is growing and **Brazil** is emerging as a leader of this new movement. The country now has 20,000 enterprises operating within this model, and, according to a government survey, 1,8 million people work in the SSE. In **Brazil** the experience of Coopamare in São Paulo has been pointed out as a very important example of SSE initiative, as it is a pioneer setting the ground for further engagement. Today, 5% of the people engaged in SSE in the Country works in collectors' initiatives. It has also been recognized that the initiatives. As recognized in the interviews conducted in the Brazilian mapping process, the generation of income (central challenge for 74% of SSE workers) and maintaining market competitiveness (64%) have been identified as the two major challenges by the Brazilian SSE workers<sup>14</sup>.

In the agriculture sector the practices of **Bolivia, Mozambique, Mauritius** and **Palestine** show in different way how the pro-food sovereignty policies and agroecological practices have the potential to create food and agricultural systems that are fair and work in harmony with the environment. They place the focus on those who create the majority of the world's food: small-scale farmers. To understand why this idea is so desperately needed as part of international development and agricultural policy and research, it's possible to look at our current food system, where food and agricultural corporations have all the say and the production, processing and distribution of food goes hand in hand with the exploitation of people and the environment. In spite of the country's endemic poverty and hunger, small-scale farmers in **Mozambique** are leading the way on this issue as proven by many effective case studies. As part of collective farmers' associations, producers' organizations and with political campaigns, they exercise their right to organize their agricultural systems in a way that allows them to live in dignity and to feed themselves. In doing so, they confront the challenges of hunger and poverty as well as the devastating effects of climate change in a country whose economy is heavily reliant upon the agricultural sector. Despite the proven effectiveness of agroecological methods, which allow farmers to win back their autonomy and adapt to protect the local ecosystem so as to limit damage to the

environment and available resources, their government still promotes industrial agriculture which serves the profit-seeking interests of agribusiness. In producers' associations, farmers organize themselves, for example, to secure access to their land or even expand the areas they use for agriculture. By helping each other in cultivating and sharing resources and tools, such as regionally adapted seeds, for example the members of the Mozambican association União Nacional dos Camponeses are able to improve their standard of living. The local food situation also improves thanks to an increase in the supply of edible produce. This model has succeeded through the application of adapted, agroecological cultivation practices, which include the use of organic fertilizers and the avoidance of chemical and toxic pesticides as well as unregulated slash-and-burn. A majority of these techniques are tested out on the associations' demonstration fields together with all members, who then transfer the practice to their own fields so that methods are passed on independently from 'farmer to farmer'. Associations also help create independently-run processing facilities as well as new local and regional markets for products. This has allowed members to move on from purely subsistence farming and start generating income by selling their surpluses, largely independent of donor aid and external projects. Other interesting "crisis-solving" suggestions in the local trade domain arise from the Malaysian and Tunisian contexts.

Both the informal economy and the formal ones rely in local commercial channels that depend on goods import to increase income but also put in place forms of resistance against the invasion of foreign products that are competitive but offer very little in terms of social and environmental quality of produce, thus providing few benefits to the local economy.

## South-North exchanges

Only three of the selected practices in this area have direct contacts with the northern hemisphere and carry out Fair Trade projects. Fair Trade definitely play a big role in addressing different development gaps in many countries of the Global South, and it can be considered a big realm of the SSE, for instance in **Mauritius, Bolivia** and **Malaysia** where it is instead seen as part of development cooperation. As highlighted in some of the researches, "the goals of the increased premiums paid for Fair Trade goods are to improve poor working conditions, raise wages so as to move individuals and communities out of poverty, to end the use of child labor and limit damage to the environment. Some of these objectives are achieved simply thanks to the higher prices that producers receive and through the premiums intended for community projects. Other goals are part of the contract for certification. Participating farmers, for instance, must enrol their children in school.

14 Secretaria Nacional de Economía Solidária (SENAES), La Economía Solidaria en Brasil: un análisis de datos a nivel nacional (2013)



This ensures that they are gaining an education, but also not working in the fields”<sup>15</sup>. Through its mechanisms, Fair Trade manages to increase stability for small-scale farmers in many different ways: “first, higher prices paid to farmers provide greater financial stability. Second, the Fair Trade system strives to create and strengthen long-term ties between producers and buyers. Purchasers are expected to engage in more than just short-term opportunistic relationships. Third, the system aims to provide farmers greater access to credit. Purchasers are required to provide up-front credit – up to 60 percent of the final price – if producers request the support. As well, cooperatives often provide credit to their members, with a portion of the premiums often used for this purpose. Fourth, the price floor guarantees a minimum price below which Fair Trade certified product cannot be sold”<sup>16</sup>. “Perhaps the most important tool through which Fair Trade aims to provide greater stability to farmers is the price floor, which is meant to provide a safety net to farmers in the event that prices fall significantly. However, although the price of products sold as Fair Trade is guaranteed to be equal to or above the price floor, there is no guarantee that they will be able to sell their coffee as Fair Trade. It is well known that setting a price that is below the market price results in an excess supply of the product. When the price floor binds, there is the potential that this occurs and the quantity of Fair Trade product supplied is greater than the quantity demanded”<sup>17</sup>.

Other good practices in **Mozambique, Mauritius** and **Bolivia** are dealing with international cooperation and also have in common the support to sustainable agriculture projects, both in the northern and in the southern hemisphere. Some projects are in fact born as farming alternatives in the North but then are offered and transferred to countries of the Global South with specific cooperation agreements, especially with respect to the techniques and the most advanced cultures in conflict with environmental contamination processes in agriculture. The experience of responsible tourism selected in **Uruguay** is, instead, an opportunity for cultural exchanges between in the North as in the South through the sustainable touristic itineraries that becomes the occasion for new ways to meet, to get acquainted as well as for mutual aid for many marginal communities.

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15 S. Harvey, Fair Trade: History, Purpose, and Why You Should Support it - <http://gogreenplus.org/green-sustainable-business-tips-resources-ideas/fair-trade/>

16 R. Dragusanu, D. Giovannucci and N. Nunn, The Economics of Fair Trade (2014)

17 ibidem

## Critical aspects

### Defining SSE

Researchers report that in this area the ‘social and solidarity economy’ as concept is considered in different way. Terms such ‘solidarity economy’ and ‘cooperatives’ in America Latina are more relevant than in Africa and Asia where ‘social economy’ or social enterprise’ are recognized, relevant and understood by the general public. All the SSE entities operating in these continents are rooted in contexts whose features vary significantly, though they all share the same commitment to satisfy social needs and contribute to the local development of communities.

### Communication and advocacy

The positive outcomes of the SSE in this areas aren’t well known by the general public, given that the issue is often overlooked by mainstream media and not well addressed by campaigning efforts. Moreover, public administrations don’t often provide the adequate support to implement information and educational activities and emerging social enterprises struggle to retain their presence on the market. Difficulties faced by these practices should be noted in building communication campaigns to fight the negative effects of certain policies on the environment where they operate and, at the same time, to identify new forms of production, distribution and consumption that will enable local populations to achieve worthy income and full time conscious and participatory working opportunities.

To this end, communication and advocacy activities should be greatly enhanced and supported by joint efforts of different entities, such as local authorities, universities, public bodies, SMEs and SSE organizations, in order to be able to achieve a stronger impact at the national level.

### Visions and economic strategies

For most countries in this area we cannot refer to an overall public policy articulated according to the needs of different SSE’s sectors. In some countries measures have recently been taken to adjust and support some of the activities put in place. It would be very useful for Governments and local authorities to prepare and share a legal framework able to stimulate, on the one hand, the creation of new organizations and on the other hand to encourage and support the existing activities that could play a model role in other areas and other

countries: the SSE experiences already provide valuable solutions to social issues that can be adapted to address territorial specificities.

An interesting lesson learnt from the experiences of the selected practices is the importance of long term work with local communities in elaborating an overall alternative proposal about economic patterns.

In countries that suffer relevant economic pressures by international capitals that are continuing to propose business as usual and to fund development cooperation activities implemented in traditional and non-suitable ways of intervention, concrete experiences and the struggle of local communities supported by governments can make the difference playing a positive role in social and economic autonomous and self-determined innovation processes.

The key path to the success is the one paved by local communities, who can show and test appropriate approaches to development cooperation and develop sustainable tools in order to create attractive and resilient links of solidarity between the North and the Global South to preserve the natural and heritage resources as well as to promote economic activities that sustain a real local development strategy in the long term.

This kind of setup would require government capacity to develop policies and strategies that allow such actors to being protagonists of these processes as well as to jointly monitor the performance of each intervention to avoid errors. These ideal conditions are far to be achieved in all the countries of the area but the identification of such issues constitutes the first step to find appropriate solutions according to the specific conditions.

## Points of interest

There are several considerations and ideas that can be highlighted from the data that emerge in this area.

### Policies that support food sovereignty and agroecological practices

The methods that industrial agriculture uses to work the land exhaust the soil, reduce biological diversity and produce high volumes of methane, nitrous oxide and carbon dioxide, thus contributing to climate change.

Continuing to support a system of industrialized food production may be dangerous for all those countries that would rather benefit from a higher degree of independence from multinational supply chains. Even today roughly 1,7 billion small-scale farmers are responsible for producing the majority of the globe's food, which they do across a mere half a billion agricultural holdings. This means that if we want to meet people's nutritional needs both now and in the future in a way that is socially just and environmentally sustainable, the demands and needs of small-scale producers need to be at the heart of absolutely all forms of agricultural, trade and development policies.

A crucial component of this would be recognizing the way in which their practices contribute to a sustainable food system – i.e. through food sovereignty and agroecological methods – and advocating these measures at all political levels.

Therefore it is important to note that all experiences analysed here are based on alternative economy and projects on organic products and pricing methods that take account the needs of farmers, producers and consumers. As a matter of fact, the strategies and policies that were detected in these experiences are inspired by the principles of food sovereignty and agroecology. To advocate for food sovereignty means striving to make all people conscious about their right to healthy, culturally appropriate and sustainably produced food. This involves countries, regions and, above all, the local population being able to independently make choices about the operational aspects of their agricultural and food systems instead of leaving these decisions up to the globalized markets and the interests of multinational corporations. This concept places the people who produce, process and consume food at its heart. Fair access to resources such as land, water, seeds and biological diversity form the basis for ensuring that households are able to produce socially just and environmentally sustainable food. The protection and re-stimulation of local food markets – in

the place of a one-sided shift towards the global market – is a crucial component of a long-term strategy to effectively tackle hunger and poverty. The sustainable development of local production and processing of food would require rural livelihoods to be kept intact and new employment opportunities to be created. It also means politically opposing a food and agricultural system that exploits people and the environment.

Agroecology is both a movement involving proven agricultural practices as well as a scientific discipline that considers the sustainable design of agricultural systems. It is often confused with ecological agriculture or the idea of ‘sustainable intensification’ (i.e. producing more with fewer resources). The concept of agroecology builds upon the wealth of experience and traditional knowledge small-scale farmers possess. Agroecology is therefore not a ‘one size fits all’ approach; it is instead based on the notion that agroecological systems are complex and differ from location to location.

The practices examined in **Mozambique, Palestine, Bolivia** and **Mauritius** all faced the issue of sustainable agriculture and local sovereignty. These experiences are characterized by the same choice, also operating in different context: they put at the center of development strategies social actors for local change, they invest in agriculture and in reinforcing the relationship between local production and local consumerism, they build trust and reciprocal knowledge among the already existing projects on the field in the different areas, they’re fostering a local and national environment at policy and legal levels for these kinds of organizations.

## To reduce, reuse, and recycle can help communities and fight poverty

Reducing, reusing, and recycling can help community, and the environment by saving money, energy, and natural resources. The most effective way to reduce waste is to not create it in the first place. Making a new product requires a lot of materials and energy, raw materials must be extracted from the earth, and the product must be fabricated then transported to wherever it will be sold. As a result, reduction and reuse are the most effective ways you can save natural resources, protect the environment and save money. Nowadays reuse and recycle have a main role in dealing with a worldwide environmental crisis. As long as millions of tons of waste are generated by our consumer society, without an appropriate final disposal and treatment, to deal with the problem at the beginning of the waste cycle becomes essential. In this perspective, a

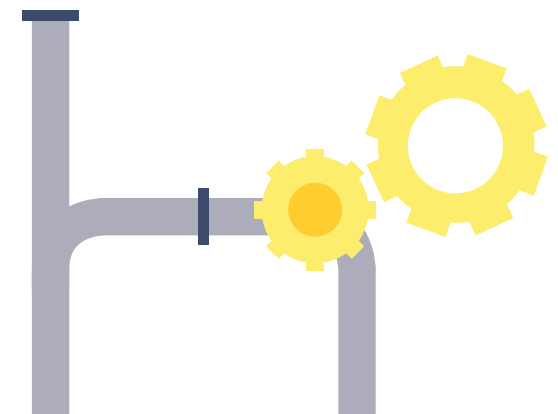
social economy around the topic has to consider two main issues, on one hand the conscious of the consumer, which could help by reducing the production of waste and classifying it at home.

On the other hand we should consider the cycle of waste once it was outside, in the market of reuse and recycle. In this sense, a particularly important role is played by waste picker: at least 4 million of them are organized in associations and cooperatives. In this area there is an excellent initiative that works on these principles while promoting great social innovation: the Coopamare cooperative in **Brazil** – and, generally speaking, the SSE-initiatives of collectors of recyclable materials. The activities of collectors’ cooperatives, such as Coopamare, are of central importance for economic and environmental development.

The recycling of waste is a very important duty, as it is an alternative to much less environmentally sustainable practices, such as burying waste in the soil or burning it. It is estimated by the governmental agency IPEA that 80% of all recycled waste in the Country has been collected by the collectors of recyclable material, who thereby exercise a very important role for sustainable development in the Country.

Empowerment, viewed as the transformation of social relations to empower hitherto excluded people, is seen as a major contribution by the collectors of the SSE sectors. Coopamare plays a special role for the collectors movement, as it was the pioneer initiative in providing better working conditions, better prices for the sold materials, as well as in fighting for the rights and the social status of collectors.

This experience is interesting because it represents a good example of how a strategy that involves this type of workers can be critical to poverty reduction, the main development goals of most government in recent years. The most



important policy field in recent time, where the collectors' influence has been decisive, is the new law for solid waste (PNRS), which has been drafted with a participatory method, with the collectors being the most influential group.

In **Brazil** the law emanating out of the participatory process in 2010 did not only include the collectors in its drafting, but it also considered them in the execution of policies. The PNRS was incentivized by a national law (no. 12,305, Aug. 2nd 2010) and deals with the principles, objectives, instruments and directives of integrated waste management, including the responsibilities of waste creators and public entities.

## Sustainability of the activities

All these experiences analysed and selected in the research have an important positive impact on sustainability. Most of these realities, in fact are environmentally, socially and economically sustainable, they avoid chemical substances, genetically modified organisms, are small scale, and not oriented towards profit maximization, but towards the satisfaction of people in needs who want food, and towards the needs of nature. They are self-determined in the management and work accordingly to abilities and possibilities of participants.

## Self-managed and collectively owned initiatives

In this area many practices identified are collectively owned and placing a special focus on the community in their work. Different terms are used throughout the concerned countries to refer to collective ownership and management structures, but all of them considered their approach to be people-centred and democratic.

Given that democratic and collective ownership and management is a core value of the SSE, the question arisen from the practices' analysis is whether or not to include self-employed businesses in the broader category of the SSE when such enterprises are aligned with SSE principles but operate in other fields of activities as transportation services, tourist services, cleaning services and so on.

## Gender equality

A core value for the SSE is gender equality both with respect to wages and to the encouragement and support to the career progressions. In this area, a particular attention is devoted to this value. In the case of Coopamare in **Brazil**, an important factor of its transformative impact concerns gender. The Brazilian sub-minister for SSE, Paul Singer, stated in the interview made in occasion of this research that 'today, women are the vanguard of the movement'. This is the case especially with the collectors of recyclable material, which have been reported by Singer to be at about 70% composed by women. In the case of Coopamare, one of the stakeholders interviewed reported that 62% of the workers are women, who mostly sustain the business, as they are more likely to stay than men. One of the interviewees further explained that considering special needs of some women – such as reserving some time to care for family members – the organization of SSE tends to be much more favourable than in conventional firms. Such consideration of work-life-balance might be an important reason for the more active role of women.

Also in **Bolivia** thanks to the democratic structures of the Agrocaïne cooperative women have an effective participation in the spaces of deliberation and decision, and have the same weight as men in decision making processes. The experience contributes to make local production considered and appreciated by local people and tourists, helping in maintaining the relationship between these people and their land, and limiting, as a result, the rural-to-urban migration.

In **Malaysia** the practice H.Gareh is a trademark that represents indigenous knowledge of the Iban community women weavers in Rumah Garie. This trademark was created with the intent of maintaining traditional intellectual property rights of the productions of the pua kumbu, the Iban traditional textile. This organization includes 35 active weavers who produce natural dyed ikat known as pua, woven on backstrap loom, all done manually. They are not hired but work independently and are free to come and go. Decisions within the community are taken collectively based on focus group discussion weighing every possibility especially to determine prices, value and volume. Non-skilled weavers are apprentices and are taught by an experienced master weaver. Empowerment of women of the Iban Rumah Gare community is supported by a continuous flow of income and fair price of the pua kumbu through the sale of the textiles.



## Local markets

Local projects are always (and in many different ways) a form of resistance against the overwhelming powers of international markets in order to defend the legitimate rights of the people involved in the working practices to determine their future. But local doesn't necessarily mean small, weak or confined in a certain context. This concept takes into account the needs and the limits of a certain territory, and implies the complete compliance with social and economic dynamics that characterize it.

A good example of it is offered by the practice analysed in **Malaysia** where women weavers are also connected to a direct market platform [rhgareh.com](#) whereby their pua kumbu can be browsed on and order.

Genuine Pua kumbu is highly valued in overseas markets but locally it is not recognized an appropriate price level because its commercialization suffers from unfair competition from products dyed chemically and mechanically tissues, which are sold at bargain prices for authentic in local market and tourist markets. "Fair share" in the context of this business structure is an alternative approach to conventional trade and Fair Trade, which is based on a partnership within the supply chain that includes the raw material supplier, weavers and the researcher as distributor and market planner.

The researcher role is really crucial in the supply chain because weavers have very minimal education, networking and understanding of accessing wider marketing platform.

Through research and networking, the researcher constructed an ecosystem to enhance the weavers' productions, refine the quality and utilization of pua kumbu as raw material via feedback and market demands. This project aims at providing the weavers with an opportunity to be independent and able to directly access the market.

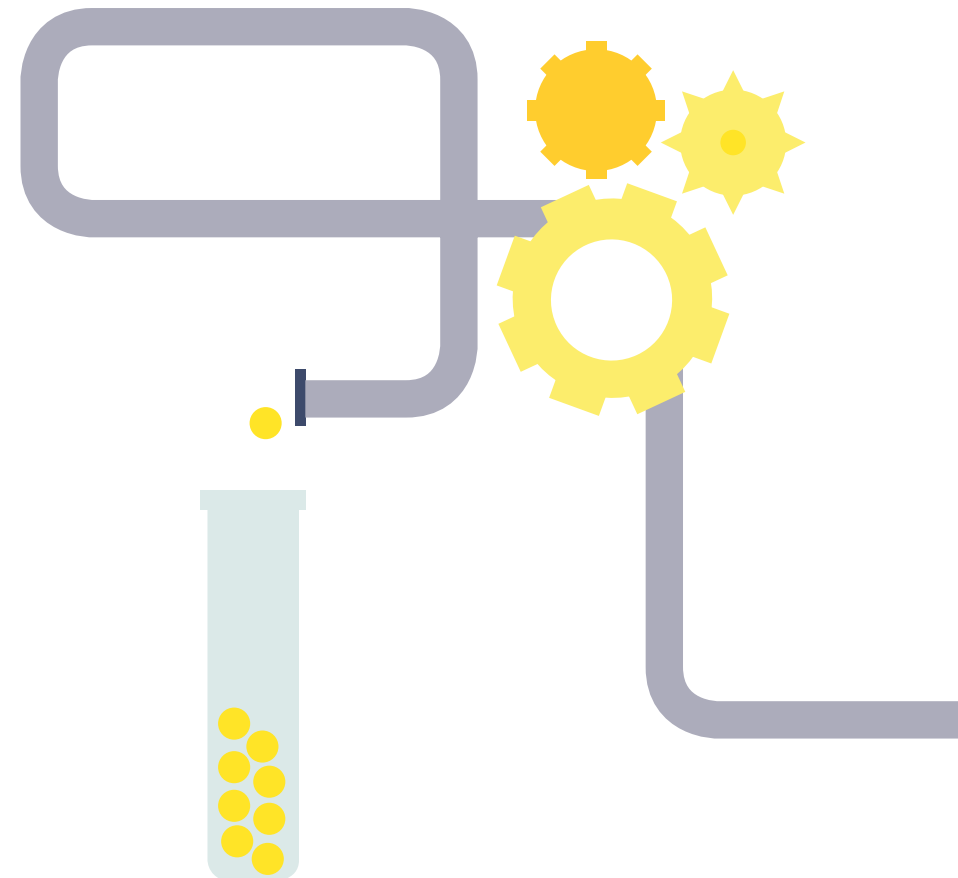
In **India**, the experience selected in the Andaman and Nicobar islands - the Central Cooperative Marketing Society - is the first and only central tribal cooperative society of the territory, and operates in several different areas: marketing, consumer goods, cottage and small scale industries, fishing, transport, credit, supervision, cooperative education and training, postal services, tourism, construction, recreational activities, etc.

This means a local integral market of particular interest to the public but largely controlled by cooperative enterprises that handle a wide range of needs accumulating huge revenues and equally redistributing them in the community.

## Preserving heritages and cultures

Responsible tourism complies with the principles of social and economic justice and exerts full respect towards the environment and its cultures. It recognizes the centrality of the local host community and its right to act as a protagonist in developing a sustainable and responsible tourism. Responsible tourism acts to foster a positive interaction between the tourist industry, the local communities and the travellers. This kind of tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building.

The experience described in **Uruguay** reaches these goals and is a good example of how responsible tourism can sustainably transform the local context in giving opportunities to local communities to connect themselves with the world



without losing their cultural values, their identity and the right to decide about the destiny of their territories. The demand for this kind of tourism is growing worldwide and as long as tourist agencies are not interested in making local development work for the inhabitants or in giving them fair benefits, the network of responsible tourism could grow and be sustainable directly connecting their lives to these tourists.

There are positive economic and cultural externalities in the territories engaged in responsible tourism. Economically marginalized households can diversify their activities by hosting tourists, as well as appreciate and value their cultural heritage and traditions by sharing them with sensitive guests. A legal framework is required also in this context to allow households to exit out from informal dimension and to help them not to be wiped out by “eco-washed” tourism holdings that very often profited of informality to reclaim the legitimacy to install their lodges or unsustainable structures in these fragile ecosystems expelling all natives or transforming part of them from small scale self-employers and employees.

The good practice analysed in **Tunisia** aims to enhance the craftsmanship and traditional heritage in the Kasserine governorate through the preservation and improvement of the local craft traditions. It aims as well to organize the collection of handicrafts and market them within the territory of Kasserine but also outside the Country. An action that not only intends to intercept a local demand, accentuated by tourism, but which has the ambition to make known and preserve these ancient traditions mainly in rural areas.

## Fair and solidarity trade and international food sovereignty rights

The role of Fair Trade in transformative trade patterns is highlighted in the Mozambican good practice. The term Fair Trade emerged in north Europe as an attempt to introduce justice and solidarity into trade between northern and southern countries. For thousands of producers in southern countries, it has been and remains an excellent opportunity to obtain better quality production, better prices, better working conditions and improved quality of life for them and their families.

Fair Trade should not be reduced to a simple sales strategy, since it can also drive sustainable local production, decent jobs, equitable relation between the sexes, etc.

# Conclusions

## Emerging models that work

Some models of intervention highlighted by the researchers based on their direct experience are of interest, especially if the entire research project is placed in a future perspective. We recall some of them, placing them within the four geographical areas.

### Innovative agriculture

**Community supported agriculture (CSA)** is an innovative way to approach agriculture that aims to deal with produce in harmony with producers, consumers and nature. CSA is a partnership between farmers and consumers in which the responsibilities, risks and rewards of farming are shared. CSA helps to address increasing concerns about the lack of transparency, sustainability and resilience of our food systems. In a CSA, the food is not distributed via the market, but in an own transparent economic cycle which is organized and financed by the participants themselves.

**The farmers' markets** are public spaces in which multiple farmers gather to sell their farm products directly to consumers. Farmers' markets may be municipally or privately managed and may be seasonal or year-round. In Italy, there's a network in Salento, “Oltre Mercato Salento”, and in Spain we find the Agro-Ecological Agriculture Fair of Zaragoza (MAZ). These experiences support the short distribution channels in establishing direct relationships between the producer and the consumer. Also, numerous activities take place simultaneously to the implementation of the practice: workshops, food tasting and information desks on local products of the area and on biodiversity of the region. A similar example is the Szimpla Farmers' Market in Hungary: a hugely popular Fair Trade market in the centre of Budapest, providing opportunity for local farmers to sell their products at

affordable stand rent rates and for locals to be able to buy producers' goods.

**Urban gardens, shared gardens, collective farming** created and maintained by neighbourhood associations in small plots of land provided by the city or occupied are a piece of countryside in town whose role is not only to give the opportunity for citizens to "get their hands dirty with the Earth".

Through the creation of shared spaces, the urban gardening becomes in fact a space generating and promoting social and cultural ties, a tool that can create a situation of mental and physical and relational wellbeing and at the same time an opportunity to exercise and maybe grow vegetables suitable for healthy eating.

**Changing food practices and reducing food waste.** In the agricultural sector there are certain practices that intervene on the damages generated by the global food system, which is based on the economic interests of global companies and it is harming humans, animals, and the environment. The concentration of market shares and powers in the agricultural sector contribute to a further deepening of the gap between the rich and poor, and between the global North and South. In order to bring about a change in food and agricultural policies, we need to meet this challenge: ensure that the production, distribution and disposal of our food is environmentally sustainable and socially just. There are numerous unfair mechanisms of injury, many of which relate to the predominance of agricultural crops for industrial purposes, products that require chemical fertilizers and that are therefore unhealthy for human and animal nutrition.

And finally all waste amounting to several million tons - 88 just in Europe<sup>18</sup> - not only down the chain of excessive concentration of supermarkets, but also deriving from food intake in homes and communities (hospitals or restaurant chains).

These practices also generate an innovative social approach and political appropriation of local public spaces for socio-ecological transition. In the meantime, a sustainable economic context was created, which allowed many small local and regional producers to become self-employed and who had already started investing in organic farming. It has been shown that a sustainable and ethical production proves successful and it also leads to a preference for organic and natural production models that can change the mainstream production and sales schemes. These experiences are building new economic relations based on trust and direct exchanges, therefore positively influencing the awareness of one's role as a citizen

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18 European Commission, Stop food waste - [http://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/food\\_waste/stop\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/food_waste/stop_en)

in protecting the environment and being proactive in local development. This in turn increases the social capital and boosts social innovation processes.

## Energy sustainability

Most of these good practices are in fact ecologically, socially and economically sustainable. They avoid chemical substances, genetically modified organisms, are small scale sized, and not oriented towards profit maximization but towards the satisfaction of basic needs of those people who want food, and towards the needs of nature. They are self-determined in the management and work accordingly to the abilities and possibilities of participants. In France, for example, Enercoop is a SCIC (co-operative and participatory association) formed in 2005, which is active across the whole of France. Enercoop is France's only co-operative supplier of 100% renewable electricity in direct contact with producers. It was formed by a working group, made up of players in renewable energy, citizens' associations and the SSE and met in 2004 to invent a new energy model. Greenpeace, Biocoop, Hespul, the CLER and Friends of the Earth and La Nef are the company's founders.

As several others alternative energy providers, it works with local players to implement production sites (from machine manufacture to assembly) and production phases, while at the same time encouraging local employment. It is also raising citizens' awareness through debates, conferences and projections. By proposing non-polluting and cooperative energy through an energy short cycle, they have a strong environmental impact on the region.

## Reducing, reusing and recycling

Reducing, reusing, and recycling can help the communities and the environment by saving money, energy, and natural resources. The most effective way to reduce waste is to not create it in the first place. Making a new product requires a lot of materials and energy, raw materials must be extracted from the earth, and the product must be manufactured then transported to wherever it will be sold. As a result, reduction and reuse are the most effective ways to save natural resources, protect the environment and save money. They also generate revenues from resale and recycling.

The SSE operates in the sector of environmental recycling, but has added social aims in providing basic needs to communities and funding community lead projects. The activities of collectors' cooperatives are so relevant that is estimated by the Brazilian government agency IPEA that 80% of all recycled waste in Brazil has been collected by the collectors of recyclable material, who thereby exercise

a very important role for sustainable development in Brazil. Empowerment, viewed as the transformation of social relations to empower hitherto excluded people, is a major achievement obtained through the work of collectors.

## Self-managed communities

In recent years in Europe a massive action of privatisation and outsourcing of public services to private companies has been developed also because of the austerity measures. In the UK, for instance, whilst this has caused much discontent among a high proportion of the British public opinion due to concerns that the quality of services has reduced and the treatment of employees and service users has worsened, it has also provided an opportunity for mutuals, co-operatives and social enterprises to emerge as an alternative to the traditional profit-making private businesses.

When faced with funding cuts and privatisation, many local authorities and public institutions have made the decision to outsource work to co-operative or mutual businesses due to their people-centred and democratic approach, rather than the alternative option of outsourcing to more traditional companies whose focus is on making a large profit. Very often employees can participate in decisions which affect their working lives, and are eligible to receive a share of the profits that the business generates, based on territory performance and group profits. Urban agriculture is promoting a strong rediscovery of self-organization and self-management and, these new initiatives also represent a strong element of social inclusion. Of course, the selected and analysed examples make very evident that this kind of initiatives requires a high level of political and public engagement in the development of SSE.

## Governance and quality of employment

Different terms are used throughout the concerned countries to refer to collective ownership and management structures, but all of them considered their approach to be people-centred and democratic. Given that democratic and collective ownership and management is a core value of the SSE, the question arose from the practices' analysis is whether or not to include self-employed businesses in the broader category of the SSE when such enterprises are aligned with SSE principles but operate in other fields of activities as transportation services, tourist services, cleaning services and so on. Another element to highlight is the importance devoted to the work quality, a fundamental factor that, in many cases, allows to make people protagonists of their economic and social life. Work within the SSE produces inclusion, social

advancements, equity, environmental reconversion and social innovation.

## Ethical finance

Ethical finance as well as solidarity investment organisations provide financial services and business support to make livelihoods and living standards better for disadvantaged communities in some of the world's poorest countries and communities. Several organisations promote a fair, co-operative approach to finance and strives for a sustainable investment strategy which ensures a positive outcome for farmers and investors alike. It focuses on long-term loans and support for producers rather than a 'quick fix' and ensures that the money it lends goes to something tangible that will help the producers to build a sustainable and successful business going forward.

Other charities, such as the good practice Shared Interest in the UK, deliver grassroots training for fledgling cooperatives, mainly in Africa, building their knowledge and capacity of skills such as financial accounting and network building. The transformative impact in countries of the Global South is demonstrated through the increase in the wellbeing and livelihoods of the producers that such entities supports, as well as increasing the confidence and dignity of the farmers who benefit from these loans. They can be proud of the fact that they are the ones who are bringing in money for their families and are not dependent on charitable hand-outs or donations.

## Innovative social inclusion

In different practices, Social economy and social entrepreneurship are perceived primarily as initiatives to employ disadvantaged persons. They are therefore called work integration social enterprises. Social entrepreneurship is perceived as an instrument of solving problems in the territory and is not perceived in its global potential. The attention of many practices to social inclusion is an important factor to be considered, because there are different experiences both in Mediterranean and Eastern European Countries that have a huge impact in supporting disadvantaged groups. All these practices play a unique role in educating and training their territories that can be taken as an opportunity to link up SSE economy opportunities with territories' demand.

## Networking in action: districts and clusters

There are quite interesting examples of organized networks; they have also been described as "clusters of solidarity economy" or "districts of solidarity economy": they are networks of associations, producers and consumers that exchange



goods and services in the name of shared principles of solidarity. Their range varies from the informal network to the umbrella organization, they're active in several sectors but all of them have as their specific objective the introduction in their local territories of closest relationships, partnerships, cooperation between local organizations, groups, local authorities towards innovative forms of local sustainable development. They may assume different legal structures but all of them share certain characteristics such as a strong promotional focus towards innovative forms of production and consumption and the ability to provide products, care and services that meet the needs of dynamic and innovative small businesses.

Some local networks are currently engaged in setting up Solidarity Economy Districts (SEDs) through the engagement of economic stakeholders, associations and institutions working in different areas. More specifically, the most significant activities they are involved in are: networking activities, cultural activities, attempts to set up SEDs and Organic districts, advocacy, sponsorships and promotion of a new economic system. There are also informal networks that connects several initiatives that operate mainly in the agricultural field, thus creating a virtuous cycle going from production to distribution. Those networks represent a basic sustainable, ethical and solidarity-based food supply chain, in a common vision of local development based on food sovereignty.

## Gender equality

One of the core values for SSE is gender equality and women empowerment both concerning the emoluments and the encouragement and support to the careers' progressions. SSE can contribute to sustainable development and become an alternative to current economic (mal)functioning by offering innovative forms of production, consumption, exchange and financing, but it can only be truly transformative if it also addresses the reorganization of social reproduction, integrating the political goals of gender equality and more equitable power relations. The Brazilian sub-minister for SSE, Paul Singer, stated in the interview made in occasion of this research that 'today, women are the vanguard of the movement'. This is the case especially with the collectors of

recyclable material, which have been reported by Singer to be at about 70% composed by women.

Thanks to the democratic structures of most part of SSE entities and cooperatives, they also pay a special importance to gender equity and women have an effective participation in the spaces of deliberation and decision, as well as having the same weight as men in decision making. These elements are present in some of the practices identified in Bolivia, Tunisia and Malaysia, in which the decision-making processes are structured in a participatory manner that translates into ways in which women are empowered, also thanks to the continuous flow of new skills as well as a fairer income deriving from women's involvement.

## Local market

In SSE, local projects are always (and in many ways) a form of resistance against the overwhelming powers of international markets to defend the legitimate rights of the people involved in the working practices to determine their future. But local doesn't necessarily means small, weak or confined in a certain context. This concept considers the needs and the limits of a certain territory, and implies the complete compliance with social and economic dynamics that characterize it. Preserving heritages and cultures

In SSE, responsible tourism complies with the principles of social and economic justice and exerts full respect towards the environment and its cultures. It recognises the centrality of the local host community and its right to act as a protagonist in developing a sustainable and responsible tourism. Responsible tourism actuates to foster a positive interaction between the tourist industry, the local communities and the travellers.

This kind of tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building. The demand of this kind of tourism is growing worldwide and if tourist agencies are not interested in making local development work for the inhabitants or in giving them fair benefits, the network of responsible tourism could grow and be sustainable directly connecting their lives to these tourists.

Another interesting option presented by SSE is to enhance the craftsmanship and traditional heritage of the various communities through the preservation and improvement of the local craft traditions. Is possible to intercept a local demand, accentuated by tourism demand, but which has the ambition to make known and preserve these ancient traditions even in far areas where many people born in these villages today live.



## Challenges for the near future

The SSEDAS research, among its various objectives, must define joint actions to strengthen the experiences of SSE involved in the research process, and more generally to promote territorial development models alternative to the dominant system. The research results have now taken their final form, and it's up to the project partners who live in many countries to learn from what worked and what didn't. The experiences accumulated in many described practices can serve as a guide and incentive for other people who are facing similar problems and difficulties, but not identical.

The project selected 55 particularly interesting and socially relevant emerging realities, after having identified and examined a much larger amount of social and solidarity practices and international relations that exist, with different vitality, in almost all countries involved in the project.

Now the European Union has a detailed map and some depth of a myriad of factual alternatives, small and large, operating through a criteria - a high human and collective value, often common to several territories - which can no longer be forgotten or neglected. Starting from the knowledge base of the project, it may open new paths of change and improvement of each country in each of the research areas to conduct other initiatives (studies, research, dissemination, awareness, promotion and propagation) or to start up companies.

Some of the analyzed experiences refer to the importance of networking, to link the companies that operate in each field and to exchange information on the work and the adopted methods. This is not just a need for communication, but of a repeated and systematic sharing that improves and enhances the activities of each group to overcome knowledge gaps that sometimes hinder the further development of the initiatives and to increase the power to involve and raise the awareness of more actors within public and private sectors. Networks often consider themselves as based on common principles, or to be the chains to combine the activities that take place upstream or downstream of each other's initiatives.

Once there is a shared awareness that this process is not a burden but a common goal, whose enhancement would benefit all the actors involved, there are already many initiatives to be taken that could be considered by all the practices selected within the project. Other forms of interconnection should also be favored such as the consortia, federations, local area networks, etc. Some of these may also carry out tasks of representation by member organizations or groups at state or regional institutions and international organizations, including the European Union.

As already mentioned in the paragraph "Challenges or things to recap", an additional potential level of collaboration in specific territories and with objectives that cannot be set in advance concerns the possibility of establishing forms of territorial collaboration and interpersonal relationships that connect actors that share the same aims.

These integrated systems could take different forms, ranging from solidarity economic districts to local agricultural development plans, that could operate towards real alternative models of local development. In the current situation of prolonged multiple crisis, the number of areas in which only coordinated action of social cooperatives, solidarity economic activities, informal groups and citizens' organizations can address the difficulties of the impoverished communities are increasing. More concretely, the analysed experiences are promoting non-sporadic core actions of support of local communities trying to protect their common heritage and to ensure a future for their children, especially when governments are distant or immersed in international conflicts. The effective experiences in those fields are not that many, but the need to rapidly start many those kind of actions (for example to deal with climate problems or refugees) is becoming increasingly apparent and urgent, and in some countries, these practices constitute the only way forward to try to get out of the global crisis.

In many territories we have collected, described, and also evaluated the laws and regulations affecting the social and solidarity activities and those regarding international cooperation, but many countries are still completely lacking an ad hoc legislation or intervened just in some specific regulatory areas. It is however already possible to have a fairly complete collection of legal and institutional arrangements, particularly at the level of regional public institutions.

Of course, every country that wants to adopt specific regulations to provide incentives to and support the SSE, should review the examples in the light of its own legal traditions and adapt economic measures to the specific context, also by using information deriving on other legislations tested in other contexts. There is one aspect that should not be overlooked, which covers the strategies and tactics to be followed in order to multiply and disseminate social and solidarity experiences within each country involved in the project, especially those outside the European Union.

During the initial phase of investigation, researchers have often stressed the spontaneous and original character of almost all of the experiences; the selection of good practices has also highlighted this characteristic, identifying significant practices that are rooted and consolidated in the areas examined.

Today, however, due to the prolonged crisis, the delay with which environmental problems are being addressed and the growing poverty even in countries with higher incomes are issues that are more and more evident. It is therefore increasingly clear the need to promote and strengthen these activities, which have now reached together the phase of maturity and should become as soon as possible the viral phenomenon that can positively intervene in every society to transform current forms of social marginalization and exclusion and, at the same time, tackle environmental problems. The reflection on the methods to follow is just beginning, but in the coming years concrete proposals must be formulated and explored; the project materials will constitute an essential contribution to the definition of the most appropriate and effective strategies.

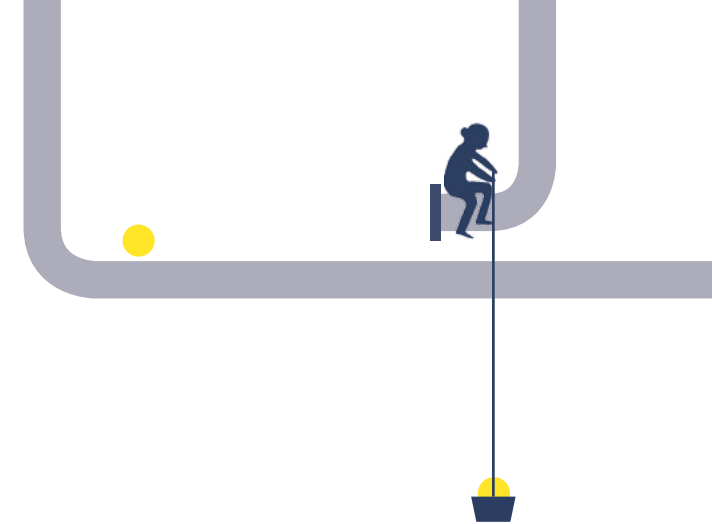
## SSE and a shared vision for all

All the results and the processes undertaken during the research project in a very large number of territories seems to outline a vision, achievable in a rather close future, of great social and human interest. It would be a mistake to make it fall into oblivion.

Both the identification and mapping efforts of social realities, as well as of solidarity and international relations, and all the subsequent analyzes involving not only researchers and organizations responsible for the project, but also many experienced and significant personalities within the SSE sector, have highlighted a potential for a development model in nascent stage. A set of deep roots that are already present, though in an embryonic form, could represent the base of a future germination of a new line of evolution that concerns the society as a whole.

SSE is not, obviously, an organic well-defined project, especially when comparing it from different contexts, territories or countries whose distances between each other are not only geographical. But one cannot overlook the fact that similar organizations have emerged in a few years in distant societies and that profoundly human values are characterizing their economic activities both in terms of contents and objectives.

They're building up some of the most innovative interpersonal and collective relationships that are substantially common in many different areas of the world. SSE, so little conventional, so fragile but so easily shared despite the language and cultural barriers, is indeed formed by realities so entrenched in their respective societies, whose existence however signals the presence of strong points of contact in terms of values and of transformative visions that aim at alternative economic and social models.



We are already in the presence of an embryo social model able to answer so many human needs that have long been neglected, whose support has led, in a short span of time, to measures, actions, activities, new jobs and changes never before achieved.

SSE isn't doing so simply by stimulating theoretical and political elaborations or only inventing new forms of constructive relations between public authorities and social needs. SSE is carefully uncovering the connecting processes, and with the imitation, reproduction and multiplication of good practices that have already amply demonstrated to know how to survive and evolve even in harsh or hostile environments. Such an attractive potential can become the object of further reflections and developments, if such processes are decoupled to conventional economic analysis, often elaborated by the academy and by theoretical disciplines.

Any "model" of evolution cannot come from outside, much less it can be imposed, but it will be produced only by the spontaneous germination of many practices that have largely proved to be viable and useful. Just displaying in each territory all the "good practices" identified in some of them, and showing the unlimited multiplication of such practices in all territories, or testing some rules and measures that have already proved to be useful in some areas, already constitute a very solid basis for this eventual "model".

But the potential that are implicit in the interaction and exchange between original experiences are only imaginable, and the support and stimulation of these is an inescapable perspective.

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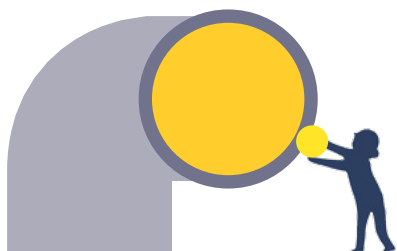
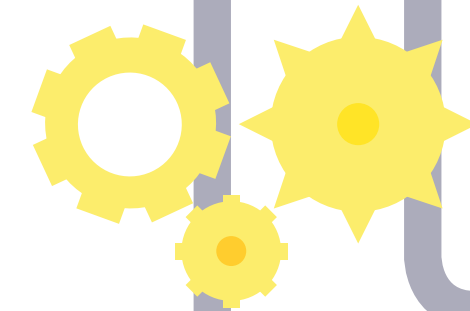
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This document represents the outcome of the Research Transformative economy: opportunities and challenges of the Social and Solidarity Economy in 55 territories in Europe and in the World, produced in the framework of the project "Social & Solidarity Economy as Development Approach for Sustainability (SSEDAS) in EYD 2015 and beyond - Grant Contract: DCI-NSAED/2014/352-248"

For more information please visit the SUSY project's website:

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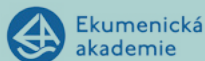
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## SUSY online map

**There are Plenty of Alternatives. Let´s make them visible**

**The SUSY research has mapped 55 SSE practices, but there are many more!**

**In collaboration with TransforMap, the SUSY project produced an online Map increasing the visibility of the Social and Solidarity Economy in Europe and worldwide. Find them in the [www.solidarityeconomy.eu/susy-map/](http://www.solidarityeconomy.eu/susy-map/)**



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