

# REVES

magazine

Public policies and social economy



**Together.  
We transform!**

YEAR 2023

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The Shifting economy and the role of the social economy

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# Introduction from Editorial Board



**Ana Umbelino** is the Deputy Mayor of the municipality of Torres Vedras, Portugal. She is President of REVES and member of GECES - Expert group on social economy and social enterprises.

On behalf of the whole Editorial Board, welcome to the first issue of the Reves Digital Magazine. This is a brand new publication that comes from the need to gather knowledge and experiences within and outside the REVES Network in the field of social economy and among social economy actors, policy-makers and local administration entities. The aim is to dig deeper into various key topics for social economy actors and policy-makers across Europe and/or in different EU Member States, bringing perspectives from leaders, practitioners, researchers and opinion makers.

The topic of this very first issue, Co-production of policy, highlights REVES' added value and unique position: bringing together local administrations and social economy actors to co-shape policies and actions.

Here is a brief overview of what we explore in this issue: we hope you will enjoy it!

It all begins with a talk between REVES President Ana Umbelino and Ricardo Rio, Portuguese economist and politician, a current mayor of Braga.

Following a brief summary of REVES' main activities of the past months, we kick-off with another interview: our guest is Barbara Trachte, Secretary of State for the Brussels-Capital Region, responsible for Economic Transition and Scientific Research.

In this interview, we focus on the "Shifting Economy" plan for the Brussels region.

The voices of practitioners bring "Stories from the sector" - a collection of four case studies, from Portugal, Sweden, Serbia and Italy. In each of them, we look at opportunities and challenges, learn from and get inspired by stories written from life and brought to us from different parts of the continent.

Then, next in order is Alvaro Porro, Commissioner for Social Economy, Local Development and Food Policy of Barcelona City Council and Director of the Barcelona World Capital Sustainable Food Project 2021. He guides us through the transformation of Barcelona's social economy, from disaggregation to cooperation.

At the end, we also want to "talk science", that's why we asked Professor Carlo Borzaga (University of Trento and Euricse) to take a closer look at the collaboration between public administration and social economy actors in drafting and shaping policy agendas.

Enough prepping for now... We are excited for you to read the whole piece, so let's start with the introductory words from our President Ana Umbelino that further highlight the core objective and added value of this magazine.

*Reves currently represents 49 members from 13 different European countries that take advantage of its continuous, reliable, and coherent work since its foundation. Its diversity encompasses multiple scales, geographies, social and political realities, and environments, providing a prime opportunity to test and co-create innovative ideas, approaches, methodologies, and tools aimed at addressing the needs, aspirations, and dreams of individuals living in rural and urban areas across Europe.*

*This intricate tapestry of places, people, and cultures shows that the well-being of citizens and societal progress are at the heart of both top-down and bottom-up processes. In this regard, REVES plays a key role in connecting European, regional and local governments as well as ecosystems in a bi-directional way, at the same time acknowledging the small scale.*

*European policy instruments must be decoded, interpreted, and improved on the ground to have a meaningful impact on everyone's lives. Otherwise, they run the risk of losing their transformative power.*

*In parallel, people's experiences, knowledge, and voices are essential in addressing challenges, highlighting the need for community-driven social innovation experiments that are evidence-based responses to specific problems and aspirations. Therefore, they must be brought forward to advise on and shape policymaking.*

*REVES is an organisation that gathers social economy entities and local and regional authorities that together co-construct and suggest ways to create or reform social economy European policies.*

*In this sense, all REVES' outcomes and programs result from a co-creation process that integrates both perspectives, a great social and political value. This particularity provides the network with collective hermeneutic resources and operative tools to tackle the complexity of current ecological, cultural, and socio-economic challenges, thanks to the corpus of reflection, knowledge, and tested experiments developed throughout its history.*

*Consistent with its foundational principles and values, listed in its charter, Reves has always practised political action, making its voice heard among European institutions that produce and shape legal frameworks and policies having impact at the different government levels.*

*Over the past 26 years, Reves has established a regular and consistent dialogue as well as cooperation with European institutions offering expertise and know-how in different areas and essential topics related to legal frameworks, policy instruments, and mechanisms to leverage and strengthen the social economy at a regional and local level. At the same time, it has built strong bonds with other networks and platforms that advocate social economy as a central territorial development pillar.*

*In several collaborative projects, it has approached universities, research centres, and knowledge production institutions, such as the OECD with success. There are a few examples of REVES' ability to create frameworks, operative models, and methodologies. For instance, the TSR (Territorial social responsibility) methodology, developed for local democracy, transforms the operational logic of representative systems into the need for community participation, aiming at supporting processes of transition and change.*

*REVES has valuable expertise, knowledge and transformative power. The organisation contributes to creating conducive local and regional ecosystems for the social economy embedded in a sustainable territorial development project. Structural thinking and capacity building obtained through cooperation leads to sustainable changes within organisations while local and regional dynamics maximise collective intelligence and creativity. The opportunities REVES provide to enhance innovation resonate in several dimensions creating a favourable surrounding environment.*

*REVES' current action plan comprises nine pillars. The digital magazine is one concrete measure within this road map that illuminates its options and commitments, showing its charter with the current context and societal challenges.*

*REVES produces specialised knowledge that must be shared to be acquired by multiple audiences and, therefore, placed at the service of society to contribute to socio-economic progress. At the same time, REVES catalyses reflection on a significant question: How to create a sustainable territorial development project through cooperation and co-construction between public authorities and the social economy?*

*The magazine is a display that creates space for dialogue crossing a multitude of perspectives and reflections, whilst also mutualising knowledge and experience. It adopts a multilevel focus by publishing work and experience developed at a European, national, and local level.*

*Papers published will range from theoretical work and research on how European, national, and local policies are aligned with the social economy's goals, principles, and values to case studies that discuss and analyse forms of social, economic and environmental intervention as well as innovation.*

# Editorial

**Current priorities for social economy policies and the important role of European exchange - a conversation with Ana Umbelino and Ricardo Rio**



**Ricardo Rio** has been the Mayor of Braga, Portugal, since 2013. He is currently the President of Galicia-North of Portugal Euroregion, and the President of the Intermunicipality Community of Cavado.



## **When we think about today's challenges in a context of instability, what are the priorities for policies promoting social economy?**

**RICARDO RIO:** The social economy can play a crucial role in addressing the current challenges that result from economic instability, inflation, and the war in Ukraine.

Access to finance is one of the main challenges for social economy enterprises, especially those operating in sectors with limited profitability. Priority policies include creating specific financing instruments for social economy enterprises, such as social impact bonds, and supporting the development of crowdfunding platforms.

Furthermore, the legal and administrative framework can create barriers to social economy

enterprises' development. Creating legal forms tailored to the needs of social economy enterprises could be a potential solution.

Additionally, public procurement can be a powerful tool to support social economy enterprises by creating demand for their goods and services.

In this sense, priority policies could include setting aside a proportion of public contracts for social economy enterprises and developing social and environmental criteria in the procurement process.

Finally, social economy enterprises often operate in sectors that require specific skills and knowledge. Therefore, priority policies could include training and support for social economy entrepreneurs and workers to develop the necessary skills and competencies to operate in their sectors.

**ANA UMBELINO:** The ongoing climate crisis has instigated a multifaceted contemplation on the means of inhabiting our planet, prompting a reassessment of the prevailing socio-economic development models that create social inequalities and environmental degradation.

What are the prerequisites for dignified living? Which tangible and intangible elements are necessary today for satisfying basic human needs while respecting the environment and other species? What modifications are imperative to make a just and equitable transition toward a more sustainable society, and how will they impact the quality of individual and collective existence? Lastly, quoting Professor José Manuel Henriques: how can maximal satisfaction be attained with minimal consumption?

This moment in human history presents a unique opportunity to collectively rethink, envision and regenerate our current systems in the pursuit of a better European community in the future.

The driving force behind this movement and transformation is rooted in social dynamics and locally-based initiatives.

In this context, the role of municipalities - the level of government closest to citizens - gains a restored relevance. And this must bring a profound reflection on the role of social economy for the locally-based territorial development project able to contribute to the desired regenerative transformations and changes.

Such considerations should be anchored in a system that guarantees our collective survival by providing the inherent material and immaterial conditions and also generates and distributes greater well-being equitably, thereby eliminating asymmetries and inequalities and endowing social justice with renewed meaning.

Therefore, within a context marked by unpredictable events with a paradoxically high probability of occurrence and accelerated changes, our assumption, premise, or proposition is that a system based on the principles of social economy is capable of nurturing more adept “people and places” not only to resist but also to create. We will be more empowered to envisage alternative, plausible, and sustainable futures as long as our communities embrace democratic governance and cooperation that enable and amplify collective intelligence and creativity.



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The Lisbon Treaty explicitly acknowledges the crucial role of local authorities in supporting a multi-level, intersectoral, and collaborative governance model oriented towards priorities that rely on the integral, global mobilisation of local assets and resources.

The concept of place-based development embedded in it derived from the well-known Barca Report, coordinated by the Italian economist Fabrizio Barca.

The Treaty asserts that European Development is inextricably intertwined in places and assigns responsibilities to municipalities regarding the design of a territorial development project, opening up novel avenues of dialogue, cooperation, and participation among multiple actors, the so-called local stakeholders.



**Braga and Torres Vedras - whose case study we can read in this issue - were both involved in the project that united five Portuguese municipalities as the European Capital of Social Economy back in 2021. What was that experience like?**

ANA UMBELINO: Braga, Torres Vedras, Cascais, Sintra, and Coimbra shaped the Portuguese network that received the European Social Economy Capital title. The experience was a privileged opportunity to build bridges between the actors of these territories that have social economy and local development on their agenda. It allowed to enlighten territorialized practices and, most of all, to raise awareness and build the first steps toward the creation of sustainable public policies that strengthen the social economy at the local level by reinventing dialogue, participation, cooperation, and power management and distribution.

It paved the way for engagement in shared collaborative projects like MU.ST.SEE. - Multi-stakeholder cooperation to strengthen skills development for social economy entrepreneurship - in which the municipality of Cascais and REVES are involved.

RICARDO RIO: In 2021, five Portuguese municipalities, including Braga and Torres Vedras, were selected as the European Capital of Social Economy. The project included different activities, such as conferences, workshops, and visits to social economy enterprises, to promote the social economy and its potential for local development.

These five cities demonstrate a phenomenal recognition of the social economy and have a strong presence of social economy organisations working for inclusion, protection of the vulnerable, and promotion of social entrepreneurship and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Braga, in particular, developed a concrete program to celebrate this title and to advance our social economy and social innovation strategy.

And we built the municipal Social Innovation Center – Human Power Hub – the principal hub for the development of the program.

The experience of being the European Capital of Social Economy brought us several benefits, like the foreseeable increased visibility and recognition of our work on the social economy, but not only.

We also had the opportunity to exchange good practices with cities from other countries. And, of course, we tried to promote, at the local level, our work around the social economy and to bring new players to the sector. It was a great experience.

**Would you like to share your expectations and wishes for this new publication?**

ANA UMBELINO: I hope this publication may contribute to creating a space for ideas, visions, and reflections on social economy as a system for a just and free society in a context of ecological emergency that reclaims the collective ability to construct alternatives to the mainstream socio-economic prevailing model.

At the same time, I hope this publication may make space for and visibility to many experiments that are ongoing at a small scale, emphasising the processes and methodologies that support them and the public policies and alternative governance displays.

RICARDO RIO: I wish this publication success, and I hope many issues will follow after the first one. These kinds of magazines are essential and valuable sources of education and learning, providing insights and information on various topics. Therefore, I think CoR (Committee of the Regions) members would like your news and information.

**As a member of the European Committee of the Regions and its SEDEC commission, what is the importance of its mission and action toward social and solidarity economy?**

RICARDO RIO: The Committee of the Regions is a body of the European Union composed of local and regional elected representatives. It aims to ensure that the voice of the regions and cities is listened to in the EU decision-making process.

The SEDEC commission focuses on policies related to social affairs, education, employment, research, and culture. One of the main areas of SEDEC's work is social economy, which refers to economic activities that prioritise social and environmental goals over profit maximisation. Social Economy enterprises are often cooperatives, social enterprises, and non-profit organisations that aim to create sustainable and inclusive growth and address social and environmental challenges.

SEDEC's work is fundamental because the social economy can contribute to regional development, job creation, and social inclusion. By supporting social economy enterprises, CoR can promote economic resilience and reduce inequality in regions and cities across Europe.

SEDEC's activities related to the social economy include organising conferences and events, producing reports and studies, and advocating for policies that support the social sector. The CoR's work can help to raise awareness of its potential and encourage policymakers to support SSE enterprises in their regions and cities.

## How would you describe the current situation of the Social Economy in the European Union?

**RICARDO RIO:** The social economy is a growing sector in the European Union that has gained increasing attention from policymakers and stakeholders in recent years.

According to the European Commission, the Social Economy sector in the EU comprises around 2 million enterprises, accounting for 10% of all EU enterprises and employing over 14 million people.

It includes various enterprises such as cooperatives, mutuals, non-profit organisations, and social enterprises, which aim to create social and environmental impact alongside economic goals.

The EU has recognized the importance of this sector and has taken several steps to support its development. In the past few years, it published several documents attesting to this. In 2020, the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling for a European strategy for the social economy.

The European Commission has also included the Social Economy sector in its economic and social policies, such as the European Pillar of Social Rights and the European Green Deal.

In 2021, the European Commission published the “Action Plan for the social economy” and is working on the Council Recommendation for developing social economy framework conditions<sup>1</sup>.

Furthermore, several EU funding programs, such as the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund, provide financial support for Social Economy enterprises and initiatives.

In addition, several EU countries have developed national strategies and policies to support the development of the SSE sector.

However, challenges remain, such as access to finance, legal and administrative barriers, and the need for awareness and recognition of the sector.

Therefore, further efforts are needed to create a supportive environment for social economy enterprises and promote their potential for creating a social and environmental impact while contributing to economic growth and job creation.

<sup>1</sup> The EC proposal for Council Recommendations has been published (June 2023). The interview was done before this date.



## Why is collaboration essential through networks and partnerships centred on the Social Economy? What can we get from it?

**RICARDO RIO:** Working together through networks and partnerships centred on the social economy can benefit social economy enterprises, policymakers, and support organisations. By working together, they can improve their performance, increase their impact, and contribute to developing a more sustainable and inclusive economy.

I can say that benefits in areas like the exchange of knowledge and experience, increased visibility and recognition, access to funding and resources, collaborative projects, and initiatives can emerge from these partnerships. Also, they can foster innovation and entrepreneurship in the social economy sector.

## What do you bring from the Social Economy at the local level to the European Committee of the Regions?

**RICARDO RIO:** I was the Rapporteur of the Opinion approved by CoR about “Creating an enabling environment for the social economy – the local and regional perspective,” which was all about our local perspective on the social Economy. And I think the social economy can bring valuable contributions to the work of the European Committee of the Regions in areas such as regional development, employment and social policy, and environment and sustainability.

Local and regional authorities, social economy enterprises, and organisations working together can contribute to creating a more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient Europe.

## Do you believe the Local Public Sector can play a relevant role in citizens' well-being?

**ANA UMBELINO:** Undoubtedly, municipalities are entrusted not only with addressing and safeguarding the interests of their citizens but also to co-construct a model of local development that generates and disseminates well-being, ensuring that all citizens, irrespective of their conditions, have access to essential goods and services that fulfil their basic needs, protect their fundamental rights, preserve their dignity, and furnish them with the necessary environments and resources for self-realisation.

This process necessitates crossing knowledge from different sources, mutualizing competencies, sharing resources, building alliances and partnerships, and enhancing participation to ensure everyone has a voice and is a building block of a shared project.

Aristoteles was among the earliest proponents of the notion of “locality” and made the intriguing observation that a homogenous group of people does not constitute a city. While diversity increases complexity, it is a prerequisite for creating a civic community.

In line with Zygmunt Bauman’s definition of the city as both an observatory and a stage, it is essential to listen attentively to real people’s genuine concerns,

predicaments, needs, and dreams.

Moreover, we need to create dialogical spaces that transform cities into places of encounter, where people can share and co-create knowledge, competencies, experiences, solidarities, and memories to empower individuals to exercise their right to a better future.

These circumstances foster the co-construction of sustainable public policies through partnerships between public authorities and social economy organisations, as illustrated by several successful cases.

In the realm of food sovereignty and governance, for instance, this issue has become a priority concern on the agendas of many local governments.

Socio-ecological public procurement is a determinant tool within these processes. General procurement procedures that reinforce and augment the participation of social economy entities in the local economic dynamics must be amplified.

Moreover, regional and local authorities should establish socially responsible public procurement processes and standards prioritising economic agents presenting a social inclusion perspective and environmental considerations.



## Having this in mind, how can we achieve local development?

**ANA UMBELINO:** To maximise local development, local authorities must strengthen their partnership with social economy entities in various domains, such as urban regeneration processes, improving fragmented social infrastructure (the backbone of any sustainable community), revitalising rural and depopulated areas, and enhancing welfare delivery.

Regulated forms of political and social participation that bring together the public sector, social economy entities and for-profit organisations are necessary to promote local development and overcome the modernist dichotomy between the public and private sectors.

We should devise an integrated multi-level governance model that prioritises concertation, structured dialogue and territories. This governance concept and architecture should be consistent and yet should foster dialogue with public authorities, sectoral and cross-sectoral public services, and the constellations of different stakeholders that form collective agreements in cities, villages and neighbourhoods. Such a governance model should also recognize and leverage intelligence

and creativity of citizens. Furthermore, it must acknowledge the complexity and multidimensional nature of the ongoing transitions, requiring a convergence of economic, social and environmental joint efforts to promote local development through planned actions performed and collaboratively evaluated as well as create a conducive ecosystem that facilitates the emergence of a civic agency. Additionally, it should enhance the production of locally-based contextualised knowledge about the social economy, foster accountability, transparency and visibility through quality assessment displays and social impact measurement.

European programs should allocate resources to hire qualified professionals at national, regional and municipal levels to promote access to public and private financial support, including financial instruments, for the social economy and public authorities working in partnership with the social economy.

These professionals can assist social economy organisations in preparing their applications for financial programs and subsequent project implementation. In addition, access criteria should take into account the realities of micro and small organisations to prevent their exclusion. At the local



level, clusterization can serve as a means to pool financial resources and provide opportunities for financial support. In addition, local authorities must support human resources qualification development, capacity building, and social recognition. In specific social economy subsectors, many human resources receive low wages, making professional careers unattractive from an economic and social recognition perspective. Collective agreements on skilled jobs, necessary qualifications, and salary regulation can improve the quality of work and attract more people to the sector, reinforcing its social sustainability.

We must enhance strategies for enabling social economy organisations to transition into the digital realm and provide adequate resources and skills to facilitate their transformation and increase their performance. Conventional investment that only targets material resources must be avoided, as past investment schemes in such resources - excluding human resources availability, skills, and competencies - have proven to be insufficient. In this context, potential solutions could include: promoting and supporting the integration of highly qualified professionals in the social economy sector, programs focused on modernising social economy through co-labs development in partnership with universities or other organisations, and such that encourage and sustain social entrepreneurship.

In REVES, we firmly believe that including social economy, the embodiment of collective entrepreneurship, in formal educational processes and practices is of utmost importance. To this end, municipalities can collaborate with social economy entities and schools to co-create contents that provide experiential learning opportunities under flexible curriculums. A repertoire of gamified methodologies and tools is available, ready to be used as a resource pool. This bottom-up process will hopefully culminate in the inclusion of social economy-related content in formal school curricula in the near future.

The interaction between students of various educational levels and social economy organisations is a bilateral practice that can yield virtuous outcomes when supported by regular and sustained relationships, as opposed to occasional interactions. Such interactions can benefit students and the entire school organisation, creating opportunities for democratic leadership and governance and addressing issues inherent to school systems when interacting with others, such as families and communities.

Lastly, increasing cross-border cooperation through engagement in networks, platforms, and alliances is recommended.



### **Might producing and sharing knowledge on social economy foster its development?**

ANA UMBELINO: Generating knowledge on social economy is essential to provide data informing public policy conception and assessment.

Data that characterises the local social economy ecosystem, enabling national and international cross-examination, is needed. Data from the social economy national satellite account, which gathers social and economic indicators, must also be considered at the regional and local level.

This mapping and characterization exercise supports strategic planning and long-term vision.

# REVES - focus on main activities in the first semester of 2023

## Main highlights



### “Regional Social Economy Policies for Sustainable Community-Driven Environmental Transition: New forms of cooperation and governance” (Torino, 24-25 January 2023)

The event was co-organised by the city of Torino and the Turin Chamber of Commerce in cooperation with other members of the Torino Social Impact Alliance, Mercato Circolare and the Case del Quartiere Network in the framework of the RESPONDET initiative, in which REVES is involved and which is co-funded by the EU.

Presentations of local policies and practices related to green transition gave participants an insight in particular in aspects of governance and partnership in Turin and the Piedmont region. Study visits were an occasion to meet local (social economy) actors combining green and social transition.

Day two served as space for interactive peer-learning activities, networking sessions and additional study visits.

### GRAPE

In the framework of the Grape initiative, co-financed by the EU and led by REVES member Community Foundation of Messina, in the last months REVES supported several smaller municipalities in remote areas in the development of strategies strengthening the role of the social economy in transition processes.

### Spring 2023

REVES has represented Social Economy Europe on the jury of the **European Entrepreneurial Region Award (EER)** which gathered this year to go through the applications of regions and cities in order to select the winners of the 2024 edition.



### RURAL Pact

REVES is part of the Rural Pact, launched in 2021 by the European Commission.

Spring has been an occasion to contribute to events such as a dedicated webinar on social entrepreneurship or to the launch event of the Rural Pact and Revitalisation Online Platform, during which the REVES secretariat was invited to express ideas regarding the use of the platform in a form of a panel discussion.



## **BREED project: “A Local Strategy for the Social Economy Action Plan” by the Community Foundation of Agrigento and Trapani in Brussels, 18th April.**

Among the speakers was also Ana Umbelino, President of REVES: European Network of Cities and Regions for the Social Economy – who emphasised that “the economic, ecological and social crisis we are experiencing requires a transition to a development model capable of producing yet at the same time respecting human rights and the environment.

To do this, it is necessary to promote: a multi-level governance model, integrated with structured dialogue with communities, access to public funds to support welfare, connections between schools and third-sector organisations in order to create new professional careers.”



## **European Expert Group on Social Economy and Social Enterprises (GECES)**

President Ana Umbelino REVES continues its engagement in the GECES expert group of the European Commission.

The agenda of the expert group included, amongst others, the recently published Commission Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Developing Social Economy Framework Conditions or the Social Economy Gateway - a “one-stop shop” allowing all interested parties or organisations to find relevant information on social economy-related policies and initiatives at European or Member State level, different form of data, analysis, case studies, etc.



## **“Social Economy 2023 – Building a stronger and resilient Europe” conference in Gothenburg, 7-9th June.**

The conference was organised by Coompanion in collaboration with REVES, Cecop and Social Economy Europe, with the support of the Region Västra Götaland, School of Business, Economics and Law at the University of Gothenburg and Fremia.

More than 40 participants representing cities and regions, social economy, universities and EU policy-makers joined a European Policy Lab “Social economy at the core of local/regional policies promoting green transition”, organised by REVES in the context of the EU-funded RESPONDET initiative.

They were given the opportunity to learn more about the drafting of action plans for green transition in three European regions and a city and to discuss possible solutions to main challenges these regions/cities foresee in implementing the action plans. The specific focus was on the promotion of social economy-based community energy initiatives and/or circular economy.

## **Dialogue with Common Provisions Regulation Partners 2021-2027/DG REGIO**

European Cohesion Policy and its implementation, including the application of the European Code of Conduct for Partnership, is the specific focus of this group of experts which came together also this spring. Main topics of the exchange were, for example, the outcome of the 2021-2027 Cohesion Policy Programming, the European Community of Practice on Partnership or the Commission Communication “Harnessing Talent in Europe’s Regions”.

# Interview with Secretary of State Barbara Trachte

Brussels-Capital region, the Shifting Economy  
and the role of the social economy



**Mrs. Barbara Trachte** is Secretary of State for the Brussels-Capital Region, responsible for Economic Transition and Scientific Research. In this interview, she digs deeper into how social economy policies have shifted their focus in the Brussels-Capital Region and gives us her take on the value and challenges related to the co-production of policies.

**In the last decades, Social economy-related policies in the Brussels-Capital Region have shifted from focusing mainly on the work integration potential of the social economy (and thus WISEs) over the promotion of the social economy as an actor operating in different sectors of activity to focusing on a policy in which the social economy and its values have become pathbreaking for economic development in general. Could you briefly summarise the priorities you pursue in the current Region's Strategy for Transition (Shifting Economy) and the place the social economy has herein?**

The economy must be at the service of people and the environment, not vice versa.

Acknowledging this was the starting point for the implementation and adoption in March 2022 of the economic transition strategy for the Brussels-Capital Region: the Shifting Economy.

Why this strategy? Because in the face of climate change, the decline in biodiversity, and growing social inequalities, businesses and the economy have an important responsibility and, consequently, a positive potential role to play.

To develop this strategy, we applied Kate Raworth's Doughnut Theory. It states that the economy can grow considering an environmental ceiling and a social base within the planet's means.

Beyond these limits, the economy no longer plays its role, on the contrary.

In other terms, the Region has three economic tools: financing, support, and accommodation. With "Shifting Economy", we have reoriented these three tools to achieve our social, climate, and environmental objectives.

By 2030, a company seeking public support must commit to a transition pathway. The goal is to make Brussels the capital of the economic transition.

For the Region, the social economy is part of the economy and should not be treated separately. We have therefore devoted a whole chapter of Shifting Economy to social and democratic enterprises, which, in the context of my competencies, are the enterprises with an economic project. This social purpose takes precedence over the creation of profit and democratic governance. These are mainly associations and cooperatives.

We have adopted actions to make these enterprises visible, to support them financially, and to accompany them, considering their specific needs. The objective is to develop the existing breeding ground of Brussels social and democratic enterprises, pioneers of the transition, active in various sectors, from breweries to urban logistics, via food, housing, agriculture, or digital one.

**Also, regarding governance, the Brussels-Capital Region has changed its approach from cooperation focused mainly on consultative procedures in the regional Social Entrepreneurship Advisory Council framework to co-implementation or even co-production of policies. Here, we can think of initiatives such as Coopcity or the Community Land Trust Brussels – the latter just signed a first management contract that, in fact, goes beyond mere management. What added value does this provide for policy-making processes, and what are the challenges you (still) perceive for this type of cooperation/co-production?**

To develop relevant public policies, we need to listen to actors on the ground. With the Shifting Economy, we have co-constructed the measures through numerous exchanges in thematic working groups. Social economy organisations respond innovatively to social needs.

Some examples could be the Community Land Trust Brussels, which responds to the need for housing in Brussels by moving away from the speculative logic,

or Senior Montessori (training for nursing home staff with the Montessori method to promote elders' autonomy).

As public authorities, we must partner with these initiatives, listen to their needs and help them to scale up their solutions that respond to current environmental and social issues.

As for Coopcity, a support centre for social and cooperative entrepreneurship in Brussels, the Region has decided to perpetuate it through a multi-year partnership, as it plays a relevant role in supporting social and democratic enterprises to launch, evolve, develop and innovate.

Co-constructing public policies with the actors affected and involved, going beyond simple consultation, is a democratic challenge.

At the regional level, the Brussels-Capital Region aspires to defend an administration open to citizens and economic policy tools that can adapt to innovations.



**A factor that still hampers, in several European cities and regions, the development of the social economy in different sectors of activity – including, for example, energy and the circular economy - is the siloed approach to policies. The social economy is – if at all – covered mainly or even exclusively by Ministries or departments in charge of social or employment policies, in some cases – even though more rare – by Ministries or departments in charge of economic policies. In Brussels, two Ministries share these competencies. How do you work with one another and other ministries and policy departments?**

We collaborate excellently with my colleague Bernard Clerfayt, the Minister for Employment in the Brussels-Capital Region. Our skills are complementary: while he oversees work integration of social enterprises, I am in charge of supporting social entrepreneurship, i.e., cooperatives and associations that have an autonomous market activity, even if it is partial.

By integrating social and democratic entrepreneurship within the Shifting Economy, my aim is to give social entrepreneurs a real place as an innovative economic model that can inspire traditional economic actors. Social and democratic entrepreneurship should not be a niche outside the economy.



Furthermore, what we wanted to do with Shifting Economy was to create a link between administrations in charge of different themes, which had little contact before. Thus, the administrations in charge of the environment, the economy, and scientific research contributed to drafting the Shifting Economy. They came together around a shared vision and managed to harmonise their policies.

In this respect, I think social innovation is at the crossroads of several competencies: we have created a social innovation pathway in which all the administrations are involved. This pathway has enabled us to reorientate several financing and support tools to sustainably support social innovation projects at all their stages of development.

**All over Europe, the number of more informal community initiatives that, due to their values and functioning, might finally be characterised as new forms of social economy have increased a lot in recent years – especially during the Covid crisis. Many young people got involved in them. What potential do you see in these initiatives for local development and (local) democracy? (How) do you intend to strengthen this type of initiative and perhaps also involve them in policy-making processes?**

Supporting these citizen initiatives or "commons" means giving power back to the people, recognizing that the state and the market are not all-powerful. Suppose citizens have the possibility and are supported by the public authorities to set up shared projects, like launching a renewable energy community, opening a neighbourhood restaurant in a space made available by the public authorities, or launching a cooperative digital platform as an alternative to the online holiday rental giants.

In that case, they reclaim their living environment and regain political power over it, in a bottom-up logic. The commons thus make it possible to make citizens committed actors in their environment and, consequently, to democratise society.

Moreover, in the economic field, decision-making within cooperatives is, in principle, democratic: each cooperator has one vote, regardless of the share of the capital. As a client-cooperator of a cooperative, you can thus have a say in the society projects: you can participate in the strategic choices of a shop, a cinema, a magazine, etc.

At the level of cooperative projects in which you take part, you vote, participate, and shape the world. It is eminently political. It is about relocating economic decision-making.



As public authorities, our role is to support these citizens' initiatives, whether or not they lead to the creation of a company in the strict sense.

In my role, I reorient all the regional economic tools to support transition projects. For example, we recently adopted a decree on the exemplary nature of companies, which defines the social and environmental criteria a company must meet to access regional aid.

Social economy companies, especially cooperatives set up by citizens, are among the exemplary structures that will be able to access this aid.

Generally speaking, all our tools, whether they concern financing (calls for projects, subsidies, regional investments which grant loans and equity investments), hosting, or business support, are now accessible to those compliant with social and environmental criteria. In this way, we can meaningfully support social and democratic entrepreneurship projects.

**"Upscaling" is nowadays a buzzword in discussing, at both the European and the national level, successful promotion of social economy initiatives. Having in mind the community initiatives we have just talked about: how far should/could they be upscaled, and how should this look like without depriving the initiatives of their community element (a fear expressed by some actors involved in these initiatives)?**

Self-managed citizen projects are spontaneous initiatives. However, some common projects fail to develop or disappear after a few years due to a need for more financial or logistical resources.

The authorities can therefore play a role as a partner to ensure and guarantee the sustainability of these projects while leaving the citizens in charge of them. Public authorities should allow the commons' breeding ground to develop, promote citizen participation, and build a more participatory society in which the commons complement the state and the market.

When we listen to the commoners, the role of public authorities is to recognize, protect and support them by promoting successful models, by highlighting citizen projects.

Public subsidies are another lever, particularly in the context of calls for projects, as the Brussels Region does every year, which has made it possible to support cooperatives' digital platforms, cooperative supermarket projects (there are now five in Brussels, based on the Park Slope Food Coop model in New York), the complementary citizen currency Zinne, or even projects for the temporary occupation of unoccupied buildings to house housing, offices, and shared spaces open to the neighbourhood.

Public authorities can also adopt tax incentives or use ethical, social, and environmental clauses in public procurement contracts to encourage cooperative projects and commons.

**The Brussels-Capital Region is very present at the European (and international) level, including European exchange around social economy-related topics (participation in REVES and other European networks, participation in events and projects of the OECD, ...). What is, for you, the added value of cooperation and networking at the EU level? Are you inspired by the example of other regions and cities when working on your policies?**

Exchanges on the social economy at the European or OECD level are very enriching. When I attend a conference, I can meet other policymakers and main actors in the social economy, whether they are networks or structures. Recently, this has allowed me to learn about the work on ecological accounting conducted by La Coop des communs in France and on energy communities in Spain.

These exchanges enable me to make Brussels initiatives and our economic policy known, but, above all, to learn about policies in other countries and regions, from which we can draw inspiration to improve our actions.

Cooperation with other countries or levels of government is essential to harmonise our policies and raise their level of ambition. I think, for example, about the fight against the excess of fast fashion.

At the regional level, we have tools to support slow fashion actors, but some of the fiscal and regulatory levers to fight against the excess of the textile sector are at the federal and European levels. Exchanges at the European and OECD level are essential to move the lines and advocate for adopting ambitious measures at all levels.

**The European Commission will publish a proposal for Council Recommendations on developing Social Economy Framework Conditions\*. Which elements would you like to see from the perspective of a region? Which measures could further facilitate cooperation between cities/regions and the social economy?**

At the European level, we should agree on a shared definition of social and democratic entrepreneurship, an essential prerequisite for raising this concept profile.

Furthermore, at the Brussels level, we have insisted, in the legislative texts that frame the social economy, on the social but also democratic character of social economy enterprises.

This latter can be split into three criteria. Firstly, a high degree of management autonomy in both strategy and day-to-day management. Secondly,

democratic decision-making power is not based solely on the ownership of capital. Finally, a transparent and participatory dynamic includes the main stakeholders concerned.

This democratic dimension must be emphasised and included in the definition of social economy enterprises.

Through my skills in economic transition and scientific research, I have reoriented the tools for supporting research and research projects in a way that prioritises technological innovation but also social ones. In this sense, European programs should help strengthen social innovation.

In the same vein, European support for creating support centres for social and democratic entrepreneurship, such as Coopcity, would make it possible to provide help that meets the specific needs of social economy structures.

These centres, if multiplied, could bring forward the scaling up of successful local projects through transnational collaborations. For instance, the digital sector, where social economy actors are pioneers in developing inclusive, low-cost, privacy-friendly, and democratic projects through the open-source movement.

Moreover, we know that social economy actors must usually operate through a mix of public, private, and philanthropic funding. Some European funding could be reserved for social economy actors or at least increased for them.

More fundamentally, via various European levers, social and democratic entrepreneurship must become a flagship economic model for the green transition. This model paths the way for the economy of tomorrow.

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*\* The EC proposal for Council Recommendations has been published (June 2023). The interview was done before this date.*

# Stories from the field

A note to the readers: you are about to immerse yourselves in four uplifting stories from across Europe. These were the ones selected for this issue of the magazine but we would like to keep this experience sharing also for all upcoming editions. For this reason, we highly encourage you to reach out to the Editorial board members and share your story with us. We would love to spread it wide and the Reves website seems a good starting point.





# Sustainable School Food Programme

**An integrated strategy to promote local economy, environmental sustainability and healthy nutrition in Torres Vedras (Portugal)**

## ABSTRACT

The Municipality of Torres Vedras developed a sustainability program for school meals that includes different stages of the food process based on four pillars: production, acquisition, preparation, consumption and healthy eating.

This process has a positive impact on the local economy, the health of the youngsters, and the environment. It makes the School Meals Sustainability Programme a best practice to replicate in its collaborative approach.

## WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

The Sustainable School Food Programme results from a clear political strategic vision created in 2007 when municipalities across Portugal took control of school food programs from the national government.

The Torres Vedras municipality established one in 2014. It is a comprehensive plan to advance the community economics, environmental sustainability, and provision of high-quality school meals.

The Municipality hopes to create jobs, increase local wealth, and spread awareness of the value of

sustainable food consumption among students, their families, and the school community by supplying local, seasonal food to schools, beneficially impacting the socio-economic, environmental and nutritional aspects of the life of its citizens.

The plan revolves around four pillars: production, acquisition, preparation, consumption and healthy eating.

- **Production and Education:** the Programme encourages direct contact with the local vegetable cultivation process, consistent with organic farming techniques, through school gardens, study trips to organic farms run by the Municipality ("Programa BioHorta Escolar"), as well as the Environmental Education Centre initiatives of vegetable gardens in small boxes.

- **Acquisition:** the Municipality has three declared objectives: to lessen the environmental impact of food transportation; to support the financial viability of small and medium-sized farms; finally, to advance the local circular economy. Therefore, the program allows people to buy fresh, sustainable products from local producers without the need for packaging.

Purchasing items in bulk, supporting short-chains for food supply, and buying food for school lunches directly from regional small and medium-sized businesses make it possible to meet the region's environmental, financial, and sustainable goals. Furthermore, this tends to indicate lower tender prices and, consequently, less interest from large corporations in being inserted into the system.

- **Preparation:** the Municipality employs a network strategy that transfers the responsibility for managing school lunches to the 12 local county authorities through contracts. Nutritionists collaborate in preparing all menus and food waste is carefully reduced by preparing according to the daily needs.
- **Consumption:** in addition to this program, the Municipality has adopted various initiatives, which range from the free distribution of fruit and vegetables to small children and daily milk distribution (European program), through educational campaigns both for children and for their parents, to combining nutrition and physical activity. "Lunch With Me on My Birthday" is one of the most challenging side programs. It entails inviting families to school lunch on their child's birthday, promoting good eating habits among adults and children together, and giving people the possibility to rate and recommend daily meals through an anonymous survey. By bringing parents to school and discussing their role in food, this program encourages the inclusion of families in the food-related theme.

### OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

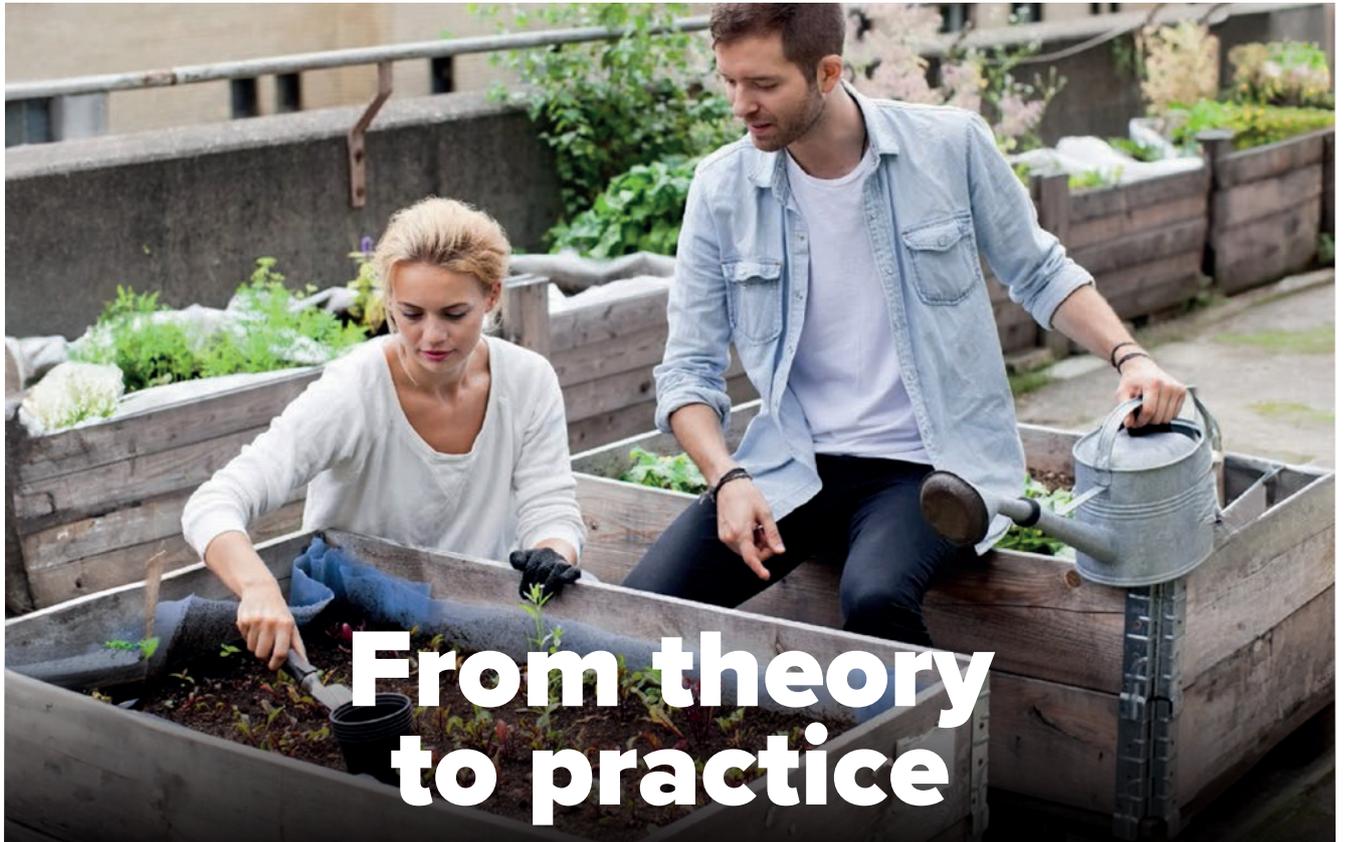
A central characteristic of the Sustainable School Food Programme summarises both an opportunity and a challenge. The initiative is considered a "program". This aspect is significant since switching from purchasing catering services from a single large caterer to building a system allows local farmers to participate and raises the proportion of organic food in school meals. The program does not include only farmers: Torres Vedras municipality assumes that indirectly all the users of the social services provided by the local services and non-profit organisations benefit from this Programme.

Yet building a "program" also increases the cost of supply, which is the main challenge: balancing demand and offer in the region. The first one tends to be higher than the latter, limited by the size of the local production capacities, the need to respect nutritional and environmental standards, and the respect of public procurement regulations. In this aspect, the political support of the Municipality is essential.

### INSPIRATION FOR THE FUTURE

The Sustainable School Food Programme applies the concept of Green Public Procurement. It enables sustainable integrated governance of the process, engaging the local population according to its capacities and specificity while investing considerable public resources. The future scenario is to extend it to all schools in the province. If this happens, it will be a favourable incentive for all producers and service providers involved in this program to continue the collaboration.





## The SALAR Handbook on Municipal and regional collaborations for welfare put into practice

### ABSTRACT

The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, SALAR, issued a 2020 manual on collaborating with social entrepreneurs based on the government's plan from 2018 on social enterprises and social innovations. As a natural extension of the handbook, in 2021 and 2022, SALAR implemented a two-year project funded by the Swedish European Social Fund to assist 12 municipalities keen on enhancing their partnership with social companies.

SALAR sought to help develop models for long-term partnerships and extended trade between local governments and social entrepreneurs in collaboration with twelve municipalities.

### WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

Based on the government's strategy from 2018 on social enterprises and social innovations, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, SALAR, published a handbook on collaboration with social enterprises in 2020. It identifies several logical steps to develop such cooperation.

After disseminating the publication, numerous municipalities and regions underlined that they needed more practical assistance and experience-sharing following this initial theoretical support.

Thus, as a natural extension of the manual, SALAR implemented a two-year project in 2021 and 2022 to assist 12 municipalities keen on enhancing their partnership with social entrepreneurs. The organisation sought to help develop models for long-term partnerships and more trade between local governments and social entrepreneurs in collaboration with twelve municipalities.

SALAR hired three professionals to work on the project: a project manager, an expert, and a process supporter. Additionally, it included experts with knowledge of democracy, civil society, and procurement.

The process of implementation of the project consisted of the following steps:

- **Build up local projects** - the common characteristic was that the Municipality had to be incorporated with the other project actors. The local project teams started as groups of officials from business, purchasing, and procurement areas, the labour market, and civil society. As they further developed their understanding of the breadth and depth of collaborating with social enterprises, they evolved and increased in size. Other project teams, however, later decided to have a smaller operative working group and a larger reference group.

- **Anchor collaboration in the political strategy** - political anchoring and dialogue are essential for at least two reasons. Firstly, collaborating with social enterprises is relatively new for many municipalities. By informing elected members about social enterprises, the politicians understand how they can contribute to the Agenda 2030 achievement and other public strategies. The second reason is that political leadership needs to give public servants the mandate to focus on collaborating with social enterprises and build an agenda around it.
- **Understand many starting conditions** - establishing an external collaboration structure for continuous dialogues with social enterprises and other stakeholders has taken different forms in twelve municipalities. In some cases, well-established forms of cooperation were used, while new forums were started in others. Here it is clear that the municipalities have progressed differently in the evolution of such a structure. In some isolated cases, the Municipality has failed to establish any external collaboration structure during the project period.

### OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The project's most important contribution has been to function as a forum for exchanges of experience and joint knowledge development, both internally within each Municipality and externally. The internal element has been about letting representatives of different policy areas meet to develop a shared view of the Municipality's collaboration with social enterprises. The external inter-municipal exchange of experience and knowledge development has been about the desire to learn from other cities. By meeting colleagues having different roles and backgrounds, many public servants and politicians have realised that they are not alone and that other peers are struggling with similar challenges.

The Municipalities signal how the project's activities have contributed to strengthening their knowledge and competence, both at the individual and organisational level, how social enterprises can contribute to the management of complex societal challenges and how they are meaningful actors to collaborate in developing the Swedish welfare system. As a concrete example: When the project started, the municipalities had limited knowledge of the social enterprises at the local level. Altogether, they would know about 30 social enterprises.

When the two-year project ended, that number went up to 86. Since no new social enterprises were born at that time, the increase is solely related to the fact that the municipalities have gained a better knowledge of the social enterprises and have become better at identifying them.

The biggest challenge regards different conditions in the municipalities. They have all had different starting opportunities and needs. They represented a breadth of previous experiences in collaboration with social enterprises. Larger cities saw key challenges in regards to increasing socio-economic differences, like income gaps, unemployment, and education levels.

On the other hand, the rural ones face challenges linked to long distances and the ageing population, which places high demands on municipal welfare. In both cases, cooperation with social enterprises was part of the solution since the latter bases their business operations on one or more societal challenges. Regarding the breadth of cooperation experiences, some municipalities had already started a collaboration with social enterprises, either in some form of an established dialogue or through procurement. Others still needed to do so.

### LEARNINGS FOR THE FUTURE

In the initial state analyses, it became clear that all municipalities needed more specific policy documents and action plans for social enterprises. However, at the same time, a few stated that there were other steering documents in which social enterprises were either mentioned or could be incorporated.

This result is an improvement for the future: the implementation of collaborative social economy policies must be structured using strategic documents that do not have to be created from scratch but be included in existing strategies. Understanding this phenomenon can help to spread even further the practice of social collaboration between public administrations and private economic actors in the territory.





# Co-creating an enabling environment for the social economy from scratch

## The first Law on Social Entrepreneurship in Serbia

### SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE CASE STUDY

The Serbian social economy landscape and enabling environment are very much in its early stage. Its struggles to take off and develop are culturally and historically grounded: as in other European former communist countries, there is a lack of understanding and distrust regarding the meaning of "social" per se. Furthermore, there has never been governmental support to develop the overall system. Therefore, social enterprises and other organisations have been left to rely mostly on international funders and their capacities to ensure they can continue the work.

But, according to Dragan Sreckovic, Research and Development Advisor at CoSED, the Coalition for Solidarity Economy Development which was founded in 2011, to develop a robust, collaborative, and harmonised ecosystem of social and solidarity economy in Serbia by connecting and empowering pivotal players in the whole system, things have recently taken a riveting turn. Indeed, in 2022, after ten years of work, the first and most advanced national Law on Social Entrepreneurship was passed, defining clearly both social economy and social entrepreneurship for the first time.

It is a big step because the law formally defines a shared legal framework for a social and solidarity economic sector, stating in particular that:

- The social economy is an economy whose prevailing goal is to benefit the wider social community and vulnerable groups and not to make profit (Law no. 14/2022 on Social Entrepreneurship).
- Social entrepreneurship means conducting an activity of broader interest, aiming to develop new and innovative solutions to social problems, to prevent and/or remove consequences of social exclusion, to strengthen social cohesion and to solve other issues in local communities and society as a whole.. (Law no. 14/2022 on Social Entrepreneurship)<sup>2</sup>.

In shaping this Law, the EU accession process, especially social inclusion, and human rights processes, was very much incorporated and clear.

But how the Law on Social Entrepreneurship came to life is a rare example of the co-production of policy in Serbia, given that there has been hardly any cooperation between the Serbian Government and civil society so far. The Law results from an intense collaborative process: the Serbian-appointed Ministry opened its doors to a Working Group of stakeholders to co-draft the text for the first time. In this context, CoSED was an active and relevant member, capitalising on its credibility and capacity to convene the country's experts and social economy actors to bring forward their recommendations, needs, and insights.

<sup>2</sup> *The State of Play of Social Economy Development in non EU-Countries - Country fiche Serbia (summary) (page 82).*

After the Law was passed, most of the Working Group members became part of a permanent consultative body, the Government's Council on Social Economy Development, that should be able to monitor further development of the regulation and advise on the frameworking steps to make it more concrete and actionable.

### OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The co-shaping and co-creation of the Law is an essential central element to its effectiveness. Indeed, there was no copy and paste in the law drafting process; instead, the Working Group carefully crafted the words and provided inputs to ensure that this new regulation would be meaningful for the Serbian social economy actors and adjusted perfectly to the local context.

Furthermore, the Law recognizes social enterprises as a status that can be acquired, avoiding the burden of gaining another legal form in the context. Therefore, the existing organisations that meet the criteria can receive support and be recognized as social economy actors immediately.

However, a few elements need to be addressed: as of today, the Law gives institutional recognition to the social economy and its actors. But it does not define concrete actions and measures to support them financially and non-financially. The focus for CoSED for the following years is clear: provide recommendations and advocate for fiscal policies and tax incentives, public procurement law, and other enabling actions that would allow the sector to develop and flourish coherently.

### RELEVANCE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Serbia, as well as its Government, is indeed centralised; however, this new legislative framework laid the foundations to incentivize actions by local municipalities in the field of social economy. It potentially could have a waterfall effect, reaching capillarity and approval of the new Law and a further push for social economy in the whole country.

First signs of interest are already showing. Užice local administration, for instance, expressed interest and readiness to integrate the social and solidarity economy principles in their 5-years development plan. With CoSED support, some municipalities started to test social procurement, moving away from the price-based approach. The Vojvodina province opened a direct conversation with the Ministry on more specific instructions and criteria on the Law and how to frame the financial support to social entrepreneurs.

KoRSe (the Serbian Coalition for the Development of the Solidarity Economy) is very much aware it cannot lose this momentum: therefore, it has

been organising informative sessions with local representatives, social entrepreneurs and other stakeholders to dive deep into how to embrace and enact the Law further.

### LESSONS LEARNED AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FUTURE

The basic rules of the game are now set. It is time to get all the players on board, keep the attention up, and develop it further. That is what CoSED is doing.

At the beginning of 2023, the organisation provided a Draft Program on Social Entrepreneurship Development to the Serbian Government arising from a consultative process with the sectors and an analysis of the current framework. Main pillars of action which the draft program foreseen for the short term, include,

- 1) Defining, even in more detail, the legal statutes and the institutional setting for the social economy actors. In this context, the programme should also focus on introducing social public procurement and other relevant regulations, especially at the local level.
- 2) Creating the financial vehicles and non-financial instruments to support the sector development and establish capacity-building programs for social economy actors and local administrations to learn how to cooperate and be meaningful partners.
- 3) Developing awareness of the value and role that the social economy plays, especially among young people, as a necessary step to overcome the cultural barriers among citizens.



In the long term, CoSED wants to avoid this co-production process being wasted and reaching a dead end: for this reason, it is strongly advocating the role that the newly established Council on Social Economy can play in co-creating the future local and national policies that impact the social economy sector. The objective is to have a harmonised enabling environment at all levels to ensure social economy actors can thrive and flourish in the country.



# Capacity

## A new perspective on housing policies for human development

### ABSTRACT

Capacity is a systemic urban and social regeneration program that kicked off in 2016 and was co-led and co-implemented by the City of Messina and the Messina Community Foundation as a strategic partner and co-financer.

By leveraging the human development theory and using Amartya Sen's capability approach as a framework, this multidimensional redevelopment program aims at enabling those who live in the city slums (Fondo Saccà and Fondo Fucile above all) to choose among different housing solutions, including the option to buy a house. It also supported the beneficiaries through customised and co-designed projects on co-housing and self-building, ultimately "empowering" them to avoid the creation of new ghettos.

First of its kind, Capacity brings a whole new perspective on how the Municipality and the community foundation collaborated and how this process can inform the co-production of new policies at the local, regional, national, and international levels. It represents a genuine, durable policy oriented toward experimenting and promoting economic approaches that have as external constraints to the logic of profit maximisation, the progressive expansion of the instrumental freedoms of the most fragile people and the advanced construction of social capital, environmental sustainability and beauty.

### THE PROGRAMME AND ITS PILLARS

With over 237.000 inhabitants, Messina is characterised by extreme inequality in wealth distribution and spatial solid inequity. The average wealth per capita in the city centre is four times that of the northern suburbs and six times that of the southern suburbs, characterised by urban solid, social, cultural, and structural housing hardship. Messina is, in fact, among the cities in the European Union with the highest housing emergency (about 1,500 families live in slums).

The "housing issue," which has remained unresolved since the 1908 earthquake, in addition to affecting public housing policies and urban development in the city, has also impacted the cohesion and quality of social capital by giving rise to "degradation enclaves".

In this context, Capacity aims to promote interdependently:

- the creation of quality urban and socio-economic systems capable of generating alternatives to human functioning related to living, employment, sociality, and knowledge;
- personalised community projects focused on socio-cognitive mediation, managed by local social cooperatives. These operations allow people in severe material and cultural deprivation to seize, recognize and make the most of new opportunities by choosing those most functional for their well-being.

As a complex and systemic approach that focuses on individual human development and tackles various dimensions, the program concentrates simultaneously on several aspects:

**Housing:** One of the critical points is the formal requalification of Messina slums. The slum in the target area has been demolished, and most of it has been converted into a public park. In the remaining part, new green houses have been built with the most advanced technological and ecological techniques, driven by the logic to overcome social segregation. Such homes have been assigned to people in need.

The people previously occupying the demolished slum could choose among the two following options:

- Messina Municipality acquires some existing housing units in the private market and assigns them to the target families through a participatory process while maintaining ownership.
- Beneficiaries purchase a home of their own by benefitting from personal empowering capital. This one-time contribution, managed by a formal binding contract, could have a value equal to 75% of the gross purchase price of the house with a ceiling that, in any case, may not exceed 80,000.00 euros. In this option, the beneficiaries become owners of the house.

**The job inclusion** dimension developed through different actions:

- Engagement of beneficiaries in self-building processes, for which the persons involved receive a full salary.
- Personalised counselling and tutoring programs for their work integration.
- The support of social finance intermediaries puts the individual at the centre of delivering microcredits, loans, and venture capital.

**Knowledge** to create a real and lasting socio-educational infrastructure: permanent actions and services aimed at generating alternatives to learning processes, supporting children's cognitive development since their birth and accompanying individuals and communities, whatever their existential conditions. This includes, for instance, the specific service for neonatal cognitive development, "Time for Family," dedicated to those lacking participatory empowerment spaces.

**Sociality:** In general, measures that promote the creation of new socio-environmental and relational spaces and processes are aimed at significantly increasing the stock of relational assets of individuals and families benefiting from the project and, thus, their social capital. This area entails personalised ad-hoc projects, both at the individual and community level, developed by a multidisciplinary team.

At the same time, the Municipality itself is implementing structural interventions, including actions in the field of urban mobility and energy efficiency, the modernisation of the public lighting system in the area of the intervention, environmental and hygienic regeneration of the site, at a high health and hydrogeological risk.

### LESSONS LEARNED AND STEPS FOR THE FUTURE

Capacity has achieved the expected results in its first two and a half years. In Fondo Saccà, it led to an entire regeneration process and the construction of a new green building (4 housing units and two units for socio-educational services). The regeneration process of the other area, Fondo Fucile, also began. One hundred seventy-one households opted for one of the two housing solutions.

As of October 2, 2019, 49 householders have been able to purchase their lodgings thanks to the personal capacitation capital, amounting to an expenditure of about 3.5 million euros. All the remaining families opted for the assignment of a publicly owned house by the Municipality of Messina.

Capacity consolidates and lays the groundwork for a significant diffusion of choices made years ago by the municipal Administration of Messina, which decided to purchase the houses for public housing on the open market rather than building new ones. Another critical result was the Administration's support and policy continuity.

The strong governance guaranteed by the Messina Community Foundation and the broad social economy cluster it leads, together with an overall vision, a solid, well-communicated program theory, an articulated financial strategy as well as the combination of multiple projects co-financed by different entities, has allowed the program to consolidate over time while reducing the risks of failure.

There are still some challenges that Capacity needs to address, especially in Fondo Fucile, a more distressed area with more severe cases of illegality. This process could be lengthier due to the need to cleanse the area, demolish the slums and timely dispose of rubble and waste that are a source of environmental pollution.

Innovation in social housing policies requires creativity also in process administration. It is desirable to increase awareness and use of personal empowering capital in programs financed by European Cohesion and Policy funds and to overcome standardised and often much more expensive models of combating inequalities and housing emergencies.

# Interview with Alvaro Porro González

The importance of the process in participatory  
co-production of policies



**Mr. Alvaro Porro Gonzalez** is an economist and former Commissioner for Social Economy, Local Development and Food Policy of Barcelona City Council and Director of the Barcelona World Capital Sustainable Food Project 2021. In this interview, he brings his unique point of view on the added value of developing co-produced policies and the related challenges, drawing from his vast experience.

## In your opinion, what is the value of the co-production of policies in collaboration with the actors of an ecosystem?

Three central values arise from policy co-production processes at the local and national levels.

The first is the irreversibility and resilience of such co-produced policies. If developed in collaboration between local authorities and the stakeholders of a given ecosystem, they belong to the entire community. They do not express the will of a single political party or political coalition. Therefore, they can outlive government or city council changes because it is complicated to dismantle them if they are produced in a participatory and collaborative manner.

Secondly, and as a consequence of this participatory process, they become policies that enjoy broad legitimacy.

The third added value can be summed up with a Catalan common saying: 'Four eyes are better than two.' It means that the participation of a variety of entities in creating a proposal makes it better, more effective and efficient, more representative of the community's necessities, and more feasible and realistic. That is how fair, resilient and better proposals are realised.

All in all, the co-production is not much about the final result but about the process and the dynamics of collaboration, confidence, and trust built during

the process. It brings actors together, adding forces to scale up results and, if well-crafted and meaningful, to establish a shared safe space. The focus is not on the final paper you get but on the value of the journey itself.

## In 2020, the Barcelona City Council approved a Strategy to promote the Social and Solidarity Economy (ESSBCN2030). How was the situation in the city before, and what pushed you to work to change it?

The road travelled to get where we are now can be summed up by two phases.

The first one (2016-2019) concerned establishing the structures, processes, and a more favourable environment within which the local social economy could evolve.

A series of enabling conditions happened all at once. On the one hand, for the first time, there was the Municipality's clear will to bring the Social and Solidarity Economy to the heart of the political agenda. And when there is this kind of support from the Administration, we can achieve remarkable results.

That meant starting from scratch, investing the first couple of years in building tools and processes, building up the specific, brand-new SSE policies with the citizen and business services, and building up the visibility for SSE. At that moment, the crisis increased people's need to network, change things,

be closer, and belong. The new generations kept vigorously demanding a change in how work and work-life balance were structured.

Finally, in 2020 the Catalonians were calling for independence, activating a fundamental process for change.

All these conditions generated a vital momentum, a fertile soil for creating cooperatives and cooperation projects within the Social and Solidarity Economy system, with public policies making a beneficial multiplicative effect.

We reached a good point in 2019, in that first phase of building up from no previous policies, and that is when we started the co-production process of the first SSE City Strategy. That moment could be marked as the beginning of the second phase, which we are still in.

As you know, in 2020, the pandemic arrived, and we were right in the middle of that creation process. The catchphrase for this moment can be "consolidate and scale up results."

Indeed, we want to create and consolidate an irreversible co-production process.

If there was the need to have structure before, now there is the need to broaden community consensus and participation: we want to create a more comprehensive framework with a longer perspective, looking further than at just one single Administration and consolidating the Social and Solidarity Economy in the community within a 10-years time frame. We've already elaborated and approved the City SSE 2030 Strategy in 2021.

We are in the phase of envisioning the dynamic of participatory and broad decision-making as well as executing collaboratively those projects or objectives we describe in the strategies. The effect we want to avoid most at this stage is 'participation fatigue': overloading people with too many stimuli and, consequently, taking them away from the process.

We must keep balancing efforts and activities so that they are in the correct quantity and intensity for people to actively participate without exhaustion.





**One factor that continues to impede the growth of the social economy in several local realities is that the municipalities act in the absence of dialogue, or even worse, of awareness of the local context. If at all, Ministries or departments in charge of social or employment policies deal with the social economy primarily or even solely. Competencies are split among actors in Barcelona. How do you deal with that? How did you define different roles? How does the partnership with other services work horizontally and vertically?**

The aforementioned significant momentum of those years enhanced a series of collaborative approaches and pushed forward the building of strong broader alliances, especially in the Social Economy sector. Indeed, at that time, Associació Economia Social Catalunya (AESCAT) was born. It was the first broader local network organisation to gather all of Barcelona's social economy actors. That meant that we, the Administration, had only one interlocutor: the representative of the overall sector.

That allowed us to effectively allocate our investments in terms of time, energy, and resources available, without sacrificing the quality and diversity of insights received, which is an unquestionably valuable factor.

As far as decision-making is concerned, the method used in this process is always consensus and never majority rule. The reason is also that we generally agree on the direction to take.

We discuss in groups, but a "nuclear group" is formed by the representatives of various families and businesses of the local social economy. Then we organise wider meetings every three or four months with the citizens to present different steps of implementing the strategy. This last step is about more than just decision-making. It's about discussion and sharing opinions. And there is an essential factor of meritocracy within the Strategy dynamic.

What I mean by this is that the strategy will go wherever people's energy goes. So the more you get involved and willing to lead and invest energy, the more attention and resources you can get for your proposals.

To summarise, we could say that the process is efficient because it puts resources where they are needed, yet at the same time, as an organiser, you need to be aware of how to boost motivation and energy, how to keep the project working and alive, and how to get everyone out of their everyday dynamics.

**Before joining the Barcelona administration, you had been very active as a practitioner in the social and solidarity economy space. Is there anything you managed to bring with you and make it adopt by the Administration?**

I have always been an activist, especially in responsible consumption, housing, food sovereignty, Social Economy, and participatory processes.

Once I coordinated the research project "Consumption and global change 2020-2050" at the Fundación de la Universidad Complutense University of Madrid.

I founded and have been the co-director of Opciones, a magazine focusing on consumption and transformative lifestyles. But in particular, in 2014, when Spain was still undergoing the financial and social crisis, I was asked by the Autonomous University of Barcelona to structure a local project, which we ended up calling ESTARTER, to facilitate collective projects aimed at facing challenges, not only issues related to SSE joint business but also other kinds of needs, orientated community projects or even activist projects. It was very much tailored to people's needs, and it was very flexible.

As a result, many individuals and groups started creating cooperatives and other kinds of projects within this framework.

However, at the Municipal level, the consulting and support platform for this kind of start-up organisation, the Barcelona Activa agency, was ineffective at that time because they had little knowledge about the Social and Solidarity Economy sector as a whole.

For this reason, once we entered the city government, Estarter's goals were partially incorporated in Barcelona Activa, leveraging the competencies, skills, and processes put in place by the project and, at the same time, the capacity for the municipality agency to reach a wider audience and invest more resources. Let's talk some numbers: in 2015, just 3% of projects and businesses maintained by Barcelona Activa were SSE; now, it is more than 11%.

When Estarter was launched, its capacity to assist was about 60-80 people annually. Today, every year, we reach out and actively support around 45000 individuals, we train 1800 people, and we can counsel 450 projects.

These numbers and results are a clear sign that you can scale up when you have the public Administration on your side.

**"Three peaches, one lemon": could you please name three opportunities and one main challenge you can share from your experience, on the role that social economy can play and the value of co-production processes?**

From a broader perspective, the first peach stands for the recent crises - climate crisis, the Ukraine war and the international situation and the pandemic - which have shown us that we need to learn to deal with scarcity.

Western countries, in particular, are used to living in abundance, but today sharing resources, properties, knowledge, and tools - precisely as the social economy teaches us - is becoming crucial.

Co-production can be a reasonable response to the current and following crises, including the climate crisis: when oil is going to be too expensive, we will need to share transportation methods. The social economy can create this potential.

The second peach is strongly linked to this: in areas like mobility, housing, energy, and food crises - which are crucial and will be more complex in the future - there is the potential for the Social Economy to get in and have an impact.

People can see the concrete advantages of sharing and cooperating in these areas: sharing means of transport, new ways of food production and innovative solutions to the housing crisis can arise from the experiences brought by the social economy.

The third and last peach: our society craves meaning and identity, and the social economy can give that by helping create a community and bonds among people.

Regarding the lemon: scaling up the social economy is a central challenge for the project. We must create more significant projects to reach more expansive parts of society. So in fact, we are just in a corner of the economy: we must aim higher and play bigger.

# Let's talk science

In search of collaboration between public administration  
and the social economy



**Carlo Borzaga.** Currently Euricse's Honorary President, served as President from 2008 to 2022. Before he was full professor of Economic Policy at the Department of Sociology and Social Research of the University of Trento. He was one of the founders of the European network EMES (Emergence of Social Enterprises). He also helped in founding and chaired Iris Network (the Italian network of research institutions dealing with social enterprises).

The social economy consists of diverse institutions, all characterised by the prevalence of people over capital and the adoption of democratic and participatory managerial processes. Social economy organisations do not aim at guaranteeing profits to their owners but at serving their members and communities. For these reasons, specific public policies, such as the de-taxation of retained earnings and other support measures, have been designed to acknowledge the social responsibility they take on. And always for the same reasons, social economy organisations are more inclined to collaborate with public authorities. Indeed, they share the same concern for their members and the community and often pursue the same objectives.

However, it should be acknowledged that the different components/families of the social economy pursue diverse interests: some aim to promote their members' interests (like agricultural cooperatives), and others carry out activities of general interest. Also, depending on the national legal systems, some have a robust economic orientation (e.g.,

cooperatives are conceived as purely economic entities in some countries); others have a social connotation (e.g., in some other countries, the social function pursued by cooperatives is legally recognised).

As a result, the type of relations social economy organisations entertain with public authorities vary in terms of goals pursued, depending on whether the interests promoted converge with those followed by public authorities. In the case of general interest services, whose supply should be ensured by public authorities, the interests of the latter and those of social economy entities coincide. Reflecting on how public authorities collaborate with this subgroup of social economy organisations is incredibly enlightening.

Social economy organisations operating in these domains, independent of whether they are cooperatives, mutual associations, or foundations, and, in some countries, mainstream enterprises with specific governance constraints are typically

defined as social enterprises. They represent just a share of the social economy; are mainly - but not exclusively - engaged in the delivery of social, welfare, educational, and health services or in the integration of marginalised hard-to-employ people; and have registered impressive growth rates over the last decades. Furthermore, they have shown very innovative development dynamics, which have contributed to the design of new services and the development of innovative governance models open to the participation of diverse stakeholders.

Similarly to traditional social economy organisations, many social enterprises were spontaneously set up grassroots; they were promoted by their founders, often with minimal resources at their disposal and without interacting - at least initially - with public administrations. In several cases - like in the health and welfare domains - social economy organisations have inspired the setting up of welfare state institutions up to the point that in some countries, mutual aid societies have been incorporated by the new-born public welfare structures (and from being private, cooperatively structured entities, they have turned into public organisations).

Social enterprises have gained momentum in all EU Member States, albeit in diverse historical phases and slightly different general interest domains, as soon as the inability of welfare state institutions to address new and increasingly diversified needs timely became apparent. The leading causes for that to happen were two. Firstly, public agencies' growing difficulty in providing proper answers to a broad set of social and societal challenges because of their bureaucratic logic and, secondly, the dearth of public resources to be allocated to this end.

Thanks to the mobilisation and active participation of the concerned stakeholders, including users, workers, volunteers, the community at large and - in some countries - also thanks to the support of other social economy entities, social enterprises have managed to experiment with innovative models of services and integration pathways that had a role in increasing and democratising welfare service supply. The key role and potential of social enterprises was recognized by many European Member States and beyond as well as by the European Commission itself, with the Social Business Initiative first and with the Social Economy Action Plan more recently.

Interestingly, all official policy documents acknowledge that these organisations pursue the same general interest objectives of public administrations, and against this background, they deserve to be supported. Most importantly, some national legislations have clarified the borders

between social enterprises, other social economy organisations, and traditional enterprises, thus paving the way for the development of collaborative practices.

Collaboration, however, may take on different configurations and has diverse scopes. It can be managed with instruments that may enhance or limit both the actors' autonomy and their capacity to innovate. Depending on the meaning assigned by stakeholders to this concept, collaboration may entail simple interactions up to concrete collaborative agendas. For the time being, simple interactions are the most widespread form of cooperation, which takes, however, for granted that any decision regarding social policies must fall exclusively within the remit of public administrations.

Against this background, decisions on which services to activate and which groups of beneficiaries to target are assigned solely to public administrations. Under this framework, public administrations are expected to interact with social enterprises exclusively to contract out the supply of services delivered by social enterprises and financed by public administrations. In such cases, interaction merely results in financing the carrying out of precise activities, provided that funded entities adapt their organisation and personnel to the financiers' requests.

This form of interaction tends to limit the autonomy of social enterprises severely, and it may suffocate their ability to innovate service delivery.



On top of this, it is not meant to contribute to detecting unmet needs that public agencies tend to overlook or are unwilling to address. At the same time, it is not structured to encourage social enterprises to actively contribute by making their resources available. This logic typically inspires public procurement practices (where public authorities always buy the service from a third party) that have been spreading in all EU MSs, especially after the financial crisis of 2008-2011 and the consequent austerity policies.

Under this framework, which is notably driven by a competitive paradigm favouring price over quality, social enterprises have ended up competing with one another and often with for-profit companies. The end result has, in several cases, been the selection of the least suitable providers and the crowding out of the most locally anchored initiatives. Attempts to limit the negative consequences of public procurement also induced by the 2014/24 EU Directive, such as social clauses, the rule of the economically most advantageous offer, and reserved tenders, have only partially resolved these problems. As a result, this continues to be the most widespread interaction path that is maintained at the European level by the recent Social Economy Action Plan.

The second conception can be correctly referred to as collaboration. It is slowly making its way because it requires a radical change in how the roles of diverse actors in social policy are conceived. The starting assumption of this new conception is that public administrations and social enterprises have converging goals; since they both pursue community welfare and interests and in many cases, the types of services delivered tend to coincide. According to this conception, social enterprises and other social economy organisations are inclined to grasp new needs, including the less visible ones, bring innovative responses, and provide their resources.

As a result, under a collaborative framework, the active contribution of social economy organisations is strongly encouraged. It presupposes that decisions concerning social policies, in general, and at the local level, are not a public monopoly. Instead, all decisions presuppose, in principle, the active and autonomous contribution of organised civil society, which social enterprises - and more in general social economy organisations - are expressions of. Based on these assumptions, the recognition of social enterprises implies their direct involvement in all stages: from the planning of policies up to their implementation in an equal relationship with public administrations. Under this alternative framework, public procurement should be replaced by policy co-planning, where all stakeholders, including

users and their representatives, are committed to contributing with their know-how and resources. Fora should lead to the joint identification of the intervention modalities, the actors to be involved and the implementers, and the resources to be made available by each participating party. Needless to say that when social services are involved, resources ought to be primarily public. But also, in such cases, social enterprises are expected to contribute with their own tangible and intangible contributions.

Currently, this way of conceiving collaboration between public administrations and social enterprises is taking place only in a few countries, namely France and Italy. An interesting case in point is Italy. The law that recognises and regulates the Third Sector (which represents the component of the social economy that pursues general interest aims, including both entrepreneurial and non-entrepreneurial organisations) has explicitly stated that "public administrations in the exercise of their functions of programming and of organising interventions and services at the territorial level ensure the active involvement of Third Sector entities, through forms of co-planning and accreditation."

An acknowledged modality as consistent not only with the Italian Constitution but also with European competition law by a recent ruling of the Constitutional Court on the ground that the social nature of the services supplied prevails over the economic one. Since its adoption, several public administrations have been experimenting with this innovative form of collaboration.

Let's compare the two ways of understanding the relationships between social enterprises and public administrations. It becomes clear that they are based on more than just a different conception of the roles of the two actors. They also differ on the ground of the diverse coordination processes used. And these key differences may apply to the entire social economy.

While traditional interactions rely on a mix of authority and contractual mechanisms, collaborative practices typically draw on cooperative mechanisms. In the former, decisions concerning the financing of services and the recruitment of providers rely on the authority mechanism. As a result, the choice of the bidder typically reflects a market logic, which presupposes the search for the economically most efficient solution for the financier, which, in turn, implies that the bidding parties should compete. And let's not forget that the authority and contractual mechanisms often struggle to grasp unmet needs and cannot rank their importance from a welfare point of view. On top of this,

these mechanisms inevitably run into information asymmetries between the provider and users (or financier) that can seriously affect the quality of the services. In the second case - when cooperation is used as a coordination mechanism - the process of identifying both needs and services is based on the voluntary adherence of all parties; hence, the contribution that each party eventually makes is the result of an agreement, which is not based on the competitive analysis of alternative offers. As a result, this process can be managed fully transparently and eventually reviewed in case of malfunction.

Recognising the basic differences between mainstream and social enterprises is a fundamental step forward, which may contribute to realising the so-called European economic and social model on the ground, where all participating institutions - public, private, for-profit, and not-for-profit - are asked to play a role. And strategic solutions may be designed thanks to the collaboration between public administrations and social economy organisations. Nevertheless, the potential of the so-called cooperative mechanism still needs to be fully harnessed.

To fully exploit it, the principle of cooperation should be added alongside the still predominant principle of competition at both an EU and national level. And this principle, which has been so far timidly applied only to social enterprises' relations with public administrations in Italy and France, ought to be

applied to the whole social economy.

Its full realisation would enable it to take stock of the still unexploited potential of the social economy to tackle many social and societal challenges. These include depopulation trends in remote rural and mountain areas, unemployment among given population groups, energy poverty up to climate change, and the pressing environmental crisis.

Thanks to the active engagement of the social economy via co-planning strategies, viable solutions to multiple crises could be co-designed jointly by public authorities and the social economy.

These would include - among others - enabling the survival of small shops in villages with sparse populations thanks to the intervention of consumer cooperatives; the integration of people that are hard to employ and the provision of opportunities to self-managed businesses through worker cooperatives'; the fight against energy poverty via community cooperatives that may ensure, nonetheless, access to essential services to people who would otherwise struggle to conduct a decent life.

Last but not least, social economy organisations are best placed to support the no-more postponable green transformation thanks to their capacity to combine social justice and green solutions by paving the way for a radical change in consumption and production patterns.





# What's next?

## Opportunities within the sector and next issue

REVES members are already preparing the second edition of this Magazine which will focus on Skills development. We hope it will appeal to your tastes.

Also, please do not hesitate to let us know should you wish to share your own experience or questions.

To keep up to date with our activities, do not miss the latest updates on REVES website.  
You can find them here:

[www.revesnetwork.eu](http://www.revesnetwork.eu)

Also look for us on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube: that's where we share our most recent activities.

On behalf of the Editorial Board of REVES, we express our appreciation to all those of you who have worked on this issue.

Cooperation starts from everyday work and it starts from us all.





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