



**SOLIDARITY ECONOMY
ASSOCIATION**

SOLIDARITY OXFORD

**Mapping the Solidarity Economy in
Oxford**

PILOT PROJECT REPORT

June 2019

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This report has been written by Doireann Lalor, Audrey Versteegen, and designed by Katherine Darling, all of the Solidarity Economy Association.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This short summary report is part of the result of a pilot project focusing on Oxfordshire's Solidarity Economy (SE), undertaken between October 2018 and June 2019.

The pilot project was undertaken by the Solidarity Economy Association, as part of our aim to support and grow a solidarity economy in the UK. It sits under our strategic objective to map 'solidarity economy initiatives' (SEIs) across the UK, in order to make them more visible, and therefore able to be supported by more people, and to empower collaboration between SEIs across sectors, resulting in a deeper collective transformation of our communities and economy.

In addition to this report, a bespoke website called SolidarityOxford (<https://oxford.solidarityeconomy.coop/>) was created, including a digital map and directory, and some short case studies.

The aim of this report is primarily to give an overview of how the pilot project was undertaken, including strengths and weaknesses of the approach, so that it might be useful to others wishing to do something similar in their area, with the ultimate aim of growing the solidarity economy movement in the UK. The report also gives some information about the context in which SEIs are operating in Oxfordshire and suggests some sectors that present particular opportunities for solidarity economy solutions.

The results from this pilot project suggest that many SEIs in Oxfordshire recognise the need for change in our economic system, and some see themselves – and are actively involved in – creating this transformation towards an economy that values co-operation, economic democracy, social justice, ecological sustainability and solidarity above profit and growth. However, the project identifies that more work is needed to support SEIs to come together across sectors, to foster collaboration and networking activity, and to undertake much broader education work about the need of and potential for a solidarity economy.

This report is aimed at people already involved in, or supportive of, SEIs. It is our hope that this report and website will make a helpful contribution to the growing amount of research and grassroots activity taking place around the world into mapping and supporting solidarity economy movements.



INTRODUCTION

Oxfordshire boasts some impressive headline figures of wealth, employment, economic growth and education. It is one of the strongest economies in the UK, and one of only three counties making a net contribution to the exchequer.

Despite this, the county is also home to some of the biggest inequalities in the whole of the United Kingdom. According to a recent report from the Oxfordshire Community Foundation, there are in Oxfordshire “some serious social problems and stark deprivation. This inequality is both a sign and a cause of the fragmentation of community, which has a detrimental effect on the wellbeing of everyone.”

Whilst there has been some progress in the private, public and third sectors to address some of the most pressing social and environmental issues (for example, the recent launch of the Oxford Greentech Network, whose aim is to support entrepreneurship towards a low carbon economy; the nomination of a Co-operative Champion and the vote in favour of a Community Wealth Building motion within the City Council), there is still a very real and urgent need for a genuine shift towards an economic system that considers the needs of people and the environment instead of the pursuit of profit and growth.

Whilst there is a lot of grassroots economic activity happening all over the UK that embodies the values of the solidarity economy (SE), the extent to which people are aware of them, or they are aware of each other, is limited. If we are to truly transform our economic system into one that meets all the needs of people and our planet, it will be necessary for these SEIs not only to be aware of each other and to collaborate, but for them to be widely supported. Towards this aim, the following objectives were sought by this project at the local level:

1. To create a map of solidarity economy initiatives (SEIs) in Oxford;
2. To raise awareness about the solidarity economy amongst these SEIs and the general public;
3. To build relationships with and between SEIs in Oxford;
4. To create a replicable model for mapping other local areas.

The aim was to specifically be of benefit to:

- People in Oxford who want to make use of SEIs to meet their everyday needs;
- SEIs themselves, as more people within and outside the SE movement will be able to find and support them;
- Software developers, who have great ideas for supporting the growth of the solidarity economy, but who are hampered by a lack of standardized data about the SE;
- Researchers, as all of the published data is available as part of a huge distributed database being created by SEA's wider Open Data and Mapping work.

A note about data

SEA has been using a particular type of technology called Linked Open Data to develop an infrastructure to connect and share data about the solidarity economy. This technology firmly aligns with the values of the co-operative movement and the wider solidarity economy. The data has been published under an Open License, meaning it will be possible for others to republish it for other maps and directories, or alongside other sources of data.

SOLIDARITY ECONOMY: A DEFINITION

We often talk about the solidarity economy as being a global movement of people, organisations, economic initiatives, projects and activity all committed to building a better world together and transforming our economic system.

In reality, it's made up of a wide range of local and regional activity (community farms, co-operative housing, swap shops, migrant savings clubs, informal childcare circles, neighbourhood initiatives, alternative currencies, community land trusts, etc), which can look different depending on where in the world they are, and the context in which they have been created. Regardless of where it is in the world, the solidarity economy movement can be identified because the actors within it all share a commitment to pursuing a set of values, which are:

A commitment to shared decision-making:

Everyone can meaningfully take part in decision-making, without one person's opinion or status having more weight than anyone else's.

Active opposition to all forms of oppression:

This includes imperialism & colonization; racial, ethnic, religious, class, LGBTQ+, and cultural discrimination; and patriarchy. Everyone should be able to play an active part in society, regardless of their race, class, gender, or any other part of their identity.

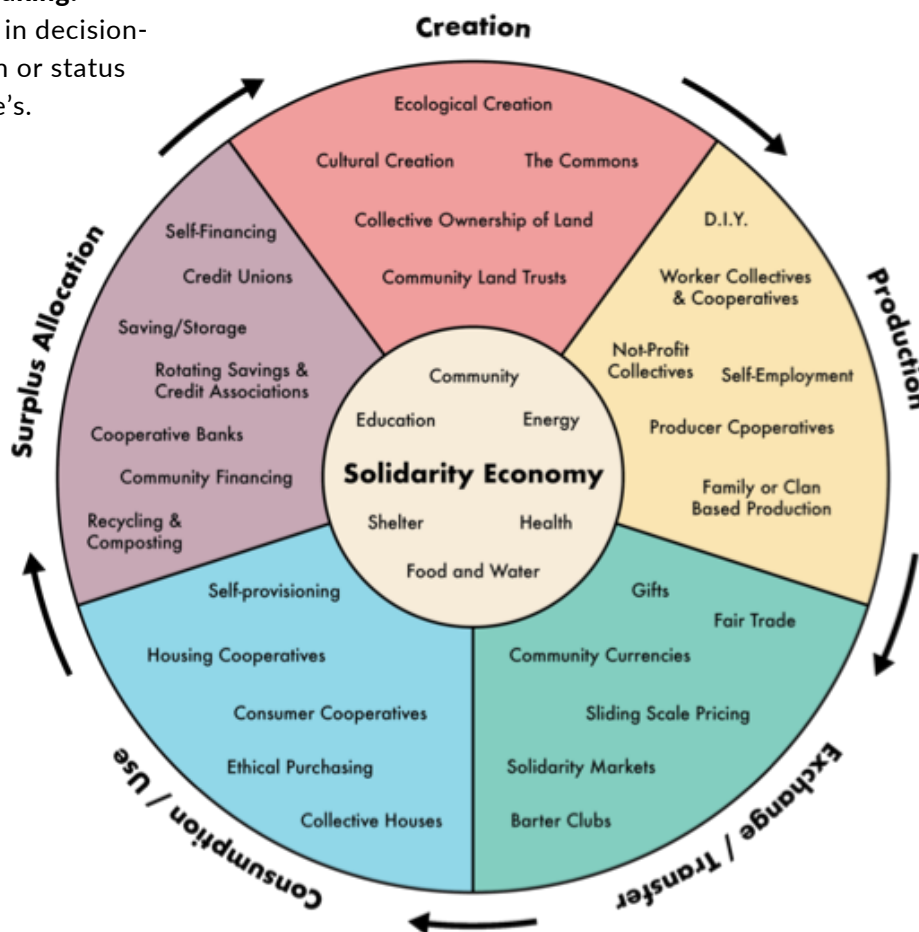
A commitment to ecological sustainability:

Nature and the environment are not seen as things for humans to own and/or exploit, and everyone strives to be part of creating sustainable alternatives to our extractive and harmful economy.

Acting in solidarity: Actively upholding, supporting, and promoting co-operation, sharing, reciprocity, altruism, love and caring over individualism, competitiveness, and division.

A commitment to transforming our economic system into one that serves everyone and the planet: It's recognised that there are different ways of meeting our needs depending on the situation in which we operate, and that there isn't a single 'right' way to create a just and sustainable world.

Image showing different types of SEIs that exist across sectors of the economy, from creation & production to consumption & surplus allocation. Image by 888 Causeway Co-operative Limited.



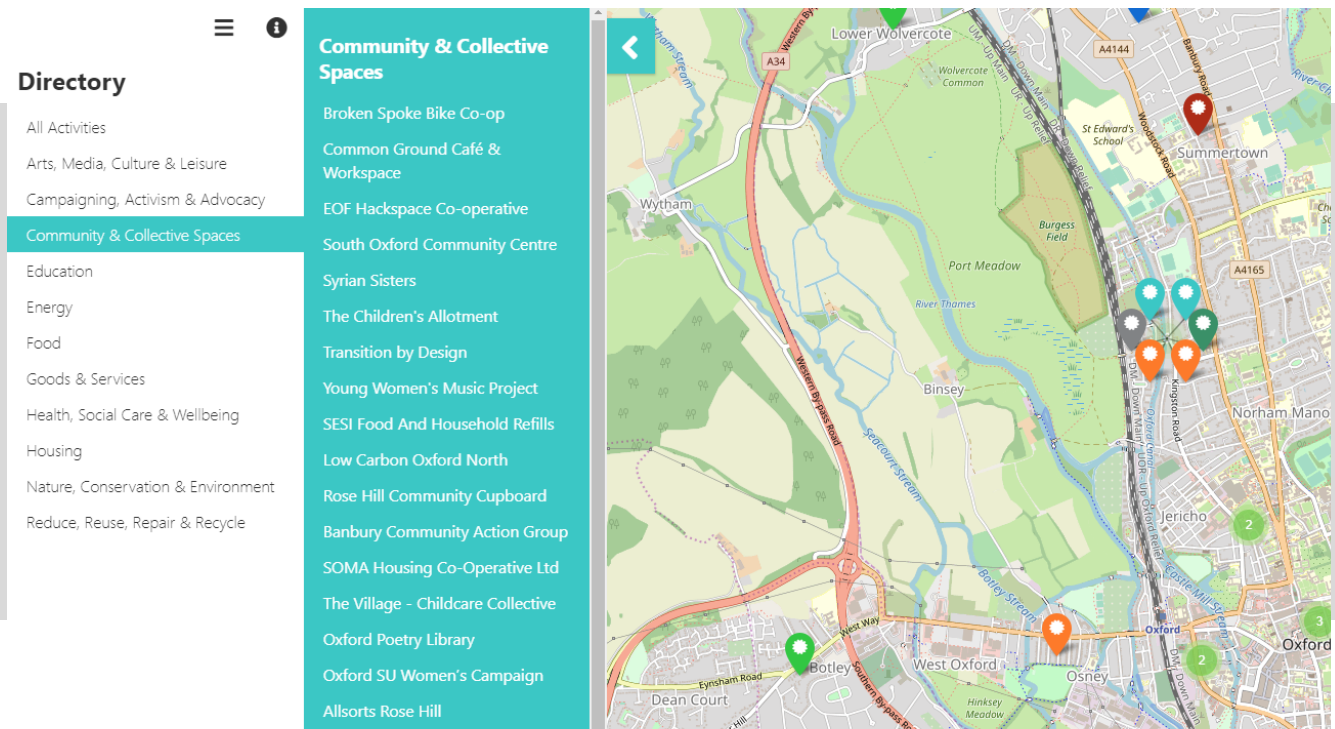
METHODOLOGY

A number of projects around the world have been mapping their solidarity economies, so the team drew on the experiences of others, particularly that of the Solidarity NYC project* in the US, in delivering this pilot, and exploring what might work best in the UK context. The pilot project team built a database of SEIs to attempt to engage in the project, which drew from a number of sources. An information page about the solidarity economy was created on SEA's website, and a survey. The survey acted as a dual 'education tool' to give information about the solidarity economy, and also to gather information about to what extent SEIs aligned with the values of the movement and felt themselves to be a part of it. The data collected through this survey was then used to place SEIs on a digital map.

We felt it was important not only to engage initiatives working to establish and run SE infrastructure and alternative economies, but also to identify initiatives that are working to support and strengthen the communities that are oppressed by our dominant economic system (i.e. that may not have any explicit "economic" angle to their work). The forms of oppression included in our definition of the SE are as follows: imperialism & colonization; racial, ethnic, religious, class, LGBTQ+, and cultural discrimination; and patriarchy.

We also ran and attended a number of events and workshops in particular locations in Oxford to help people understand what we were trying to do, and learn more about the solidarity economy.

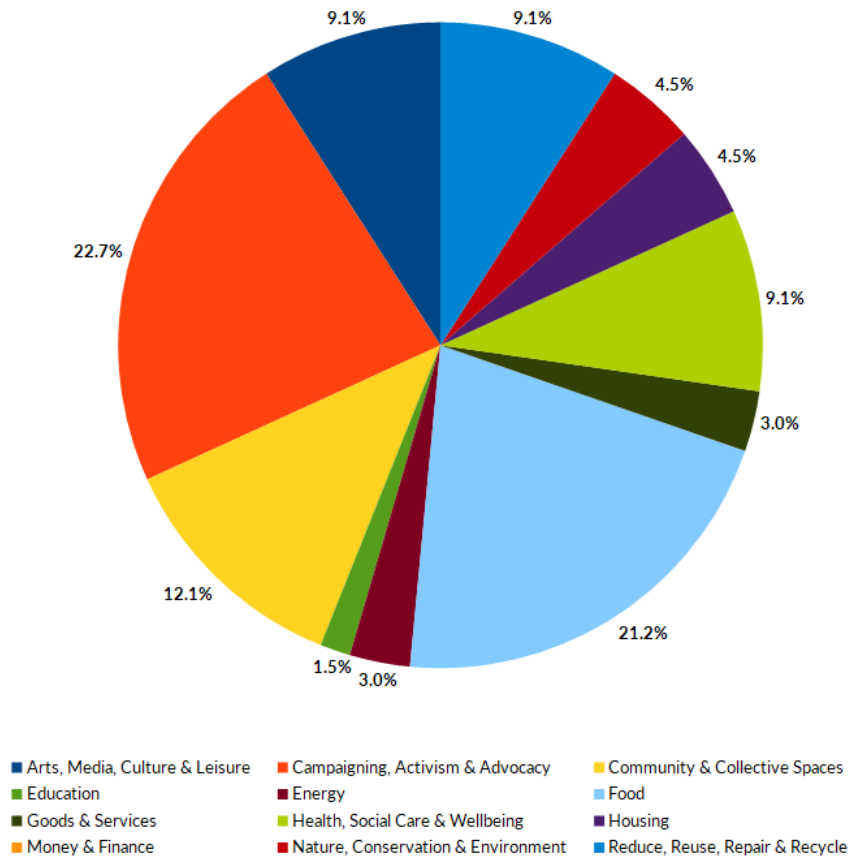
*<http://solidaritynyc.org/>



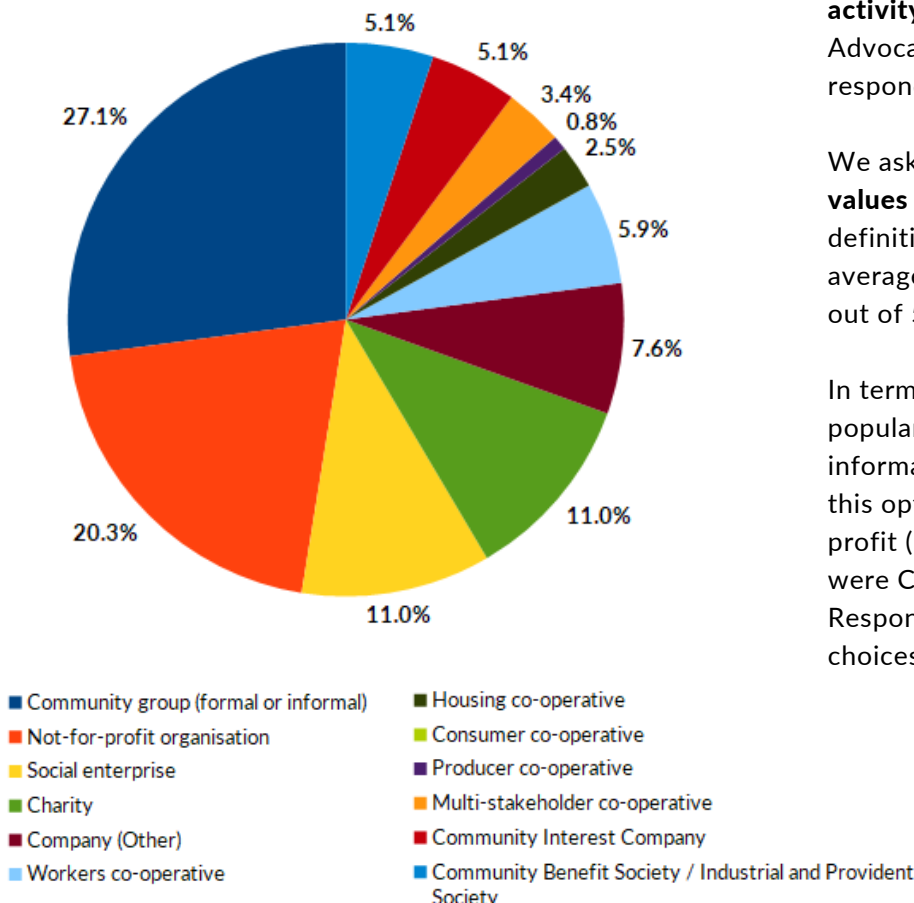
SURVEY RESULTS

We built an online survey using LimeSurvey, an open source online survey tool, and invited organisations to complete it if they wanted to be included on SolidarityOxford. We included a description of the solidarity economy at the beginning. The idea was to educate people about what the SE was, which would help them to determine whether they identified with it and felt their initiatives/activities fit within it. Respondents were asked to respond stating in what ways their work fits the SE values. This was our way of stripping out our power from the process, which we had decided was a priority. We did not want to be the ones to determine “who’s in and who’s out”, but rather to equip people to determine this themselves, and also to suggest other organisations that could be invited to self-nominate. We also asked people to tell us their main sector of activity and organisational structure.

Main sector of activity



Organisational Structure



A total of 66 SEIs in Oxfordshire filled in the survey, with the most popular **sectors of activity** being Campaigning, Activism & Advocacy (15 respondents) and Food (14 respondents).

We asked people to indicate which of the **values** of the solidarity economy (see definition above) they identified with. On average, organisations self-identified with 4 out of 5 of the values.

In terms of **organisational structure**, the most popular was Community group (formal or informal), with 48% of respondents selecting this option. This was followed by Not-for-profit (36% of respondents) and joint third were Charity and Social Enterprise (19% each). Respondents were able to select multiple choices.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR OXFORD'S SOLIDARITY ECONOMY

A number of organisations have carried out a considerable amount of work to develop strategic plans to address some of the issues in Oxford in ways that would reinforce its existing strengths and identify and address some of its main challenges. The work of the Oxfordshire Community Foundation, as well as community consultations led in preparation of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 identified housing as a particular challenge for Oxford, as well as attainment in primary and secondary schools for local pupils. The results from this pilot project suggest that SE initiatives are playing a particularly important role in these areas.

Education & Childcare

Whilst Oxford is already a world-recognised centre of education, there is a growing number of alternative childcare and education groups that are thriving in the city, such as The Village childcare co-operative (pictured below),

The Children's Allotment, and more. Finding ways to respond to the needs of these initiatives, and supporting them to collaborate is crucial.

Housing

As the most expensive city in the UK, Oxford desperately needs alternatives that actually have the potential to house its diverse population. With a growing number of community-led co-operative, co-housing affordable solutions already being developed here, this sector could become a beacon for other areas if it is supported.

Food, Hospitality & Entertainment

As one of the best-known tourist destinations around the world, Oxford should boast a hospitality sector of the best quality, selling locally and ethically sourced ingredients to financially support the rest of the county as much as possible, while protecting its environment.



The Village childcare co-operative

KEY REFLECTIONS

In-depth education work needs to happen at an early stage

At the start of the pilot we recognised that the very issue we were trying to address - that awareness and understanding of the SE is low in the UK - would also be a barrier for people engaging in the project. Our experience was that this was indeed the case. Whilst our close partners and allies were excited to learn more about the SE and immediately saw themselves as part of a wider global movement, this was not the case for everyone. Some people we spoke to felt that their main focus was within their specific sector of activity, and whilst they were deeply committed to transforming this sector (for example, localising the food system), wider system change wasn't seen as a motivation for what they do. Some people also expressed that they were tired of programmes attempting to 'bring everyone together' because it was seen as another drain on limited time.

We therefore recognise that a lot more work needs to be done to help people find time and ways to learn about the need for a solidarity economy first, before they can self-identify with it. This should include making time and space to listen to the needs of grassroots initiatives. We also recognise that this longer-term political education work takes significant time and resources, and also needs to be genuinely bottom-up in approach.

Because this was a pilot project, we developed and refined our communications materials as we went along and received constant feedback. However, we recognise that going forward it is necessary to have fully-developed ways of communicating about the solidarity economy that appeal to many different audiences at the outset.

Not having a website and map live when engaging beyond the early adopters was a barrier

For many, the project remained quite abstract despite our work to communicate about the benefits of being more visible as part of a wider movement of SEIs in the county. Therefore a key learning was that having a map with even just a handful of SEIs on would help to bring the project to life at an earlier stage and help people to understand the potential.

Despite some of the challenges, it was clear that the need for a solidarity economy resonated with many of the people we spoke to or who filled in the survey in Oxford. The Solidarity Economy Association is working on a similar pilot project in Newcastle with local partners, which has been able to address some of the above challenges, and this has resulted in a deeper understanding of the SE by more people. At the time of writing this report, that project is still underway, so further lessons and ways of replicating the project in other locations may become apparent.

Please visit <https://oxford.solidarityeconomy.coop/> to explore the SolidarityOxford website, map and directory. If you're interested in doing something similar in your location, we'd love to hear from you.

THANK YOU

Thank you to everybody who has participated in this pilot project by filling in the survey, attending workshops, talking to us about the SE, or providing advice and support.

If you would like to find out more about us, please visit our website at <https://www.solidarityeconomy.coop/>.

We're a multi-stakeholder co-operative based in Oxford and we strive to embody the values of the solidarity economy in everything we do.

Our vision is a thriving solidarity economy for the UK - an economic system that has the values of democracy, social justice, ecological sustainability, and co-operation in its DNA.

Our mission is to support the growth of the solidarity economy by educating, empowering and inspiring communities who are committed to economic and social justice, and giving them the confidence to create, join or support initiatives that live and breathe these values.

We do this by sharing the huge amount of knowledge and experience that exists from solidarity economy movements around the world; by running projects that deliver sustainable community development, economic democracy, social justice and community ownership in regions of the UK, and by collaborating with local, national and international partners on a wide range of activity.

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t: +44 (0)7983 390434

e: info@solidarityeconomy.coop

Makespace Oxford, 1 Aristotle Lane, Oxford,
OX2 6TP

