



Activity report for RIPESS Europe 2011/2013

RIPESS Europe-Solidarity Economy Europe defined their objectives and a work programme at the founding Congress in September 2011 in Barcelona. This provided the basis for signing an Agreement with the Charles Léopold Meyer Foundation for the Progress of Humankind on June 19th 2012. The objectives were reformulated in a Coordination Committee (CoCo) meeting in Chãos in Portugal. The CoCo also held a Skype meeting on June 5th 2012.

Summary of the objectives for 2012–2013:

- Network facilitation:

Raise visibility of the network, actors and experience of solidarity economy (internal and external visibility) at European level. Expand the existing network towards Northern and Eastern Europe in order to achieve greater cultural and linguistic diversity. Develop and promote economic cooperation between SSE networks and actors.

- Analysis and proposals:

Share experience and good practice, build joint projects, develop collective intelligence and a shared voice.

- Carry ideas and advocacy:

In the phase of strengthening the network the primary vocation of RIPESS Europe is not to lobby in Brussels. It will however maintain connections with European and International institutions according to issues and interest at stake at any given moment.

The 6 work themes for the 2012 –2013:

GT 1: Identity - Expansion – Mapping

GT2: SSGI (Social Services of General Interest) relations with public authorities

GT3: Production and Consumption and territorial sovereignty

GT4: consumption, fair trade and ethical finance

GT5: SSE alternatives to capitalism

GT6: Strategies and European issues

The first action undertaken by RIPESS Europe to achieve its objectives was to recruit Mr Pol Vidal as part-time Executive Secretary (c.f. CV annex 1) on a limited term contract from July 2012 to December 2013, with the idea of both quantitative and qualitative consolidation of the network.

During the last 12 months the RIPESS Europe activities have concentrated on strengthening the links between the founding members of RIPESS Europe and those of the other continents, projecting the visibility of social and solidarity economy at European level and connecting with other social movements that promote the long-term change of our society. It has thus consolidated the feeling of being part of a social and solidarity economy as a political project, as well as the conviction that it is only by coming together in a shared, structured intercontinental project will enable us to achieve recognition as an actor able to impact European institutions and political decision-makers.

These objectives were met through the combined efforts of field visits and participating in key events held by the members' networks, the bi-monthly publication of a newsletter, participating in the Social Economy Intergroup meetings in the European Parliament, facilitating a website that includes innovative experiences and good practice of European solidarity economy groups, RIPESS Europe Coordinating Committee meetings, creation of a Facebook page, contacts with future new members in Northern and Eastern Europe, participation in the World Social Forum, preparation of the organisation of the General Assembly as well as supporting the preparation of the programme for the 5th meeting of globalisation of solidarity that will take place in Manila next October. The declared objective is clearly to help the networks overcome their isolation and build relationships that reach beyond national borders. Exchange has been developed on how to act and organise the governance structures as well as the strategies to make both the networks and their experience more visible, including the different relationships that are possible with public authorities and society in general.

- **The field visits** helped establish a precise evaluation of the needs and expectations of each network as well as the state of solidarity economy in the country visited. All in all, the executive secretary made 6 field visits in all, and met seven different networks: the Catalan network (XES), the Midi-Pyrénées region network (ADEPES), the sectorial network of the

European P'Acts, the Hungarian national network (KIFESZ), the regional network Sesterzo, the sectorial network of Urgneci-Italy, the Romanian network CRIES, as well as the Italian network CNCA. Each visit included interviews with grass-roots activists of the networks, based on previously-developed questionnaires (c.f. annex 2).

The full reports of the Catalan network (annex 3) and that for Midi-Pyrenees (annex 4) and Hungary (annex 5) are included.

- **The participation of the RIPESS Europe executive secretary in key events on some of the member networks** enabled us to disseminate the RIPESS Europe message of territorial grounding of the network and to demonstrate the vitality of some of our members in a non-exhaustive manner.

The first Catalan Solidarity Economy Fair took place in Barcelona 27th-28th October 2012. The RIPESS Europe executive secretary participated in a round table discussion on the international dimension of solidarity economy, together with representatives from the solidarity economy networks in Quebec, Brazil, France and Morocco. He also had the pleasure of presenting RIPESS Europe to the public, and discussing conceptual issues and news on European and International solidarity economy in the symposium that followed (<http://www.firaesc.org/>).

One month later, at the Regional Forum for Social and Solidarity Economy in the Midi-Pyrénées Region, that took place in Toulouse 27th and 28th November 2012, RIPESS-Europe had a stand, which enabled us to distribute EIPESS Europe fliers and hold a constructive dialogue with participants on the nature and mission of the European network. It also allowed people to discover the existence of a European and international structure dedicated to the promotion of their activities and the defence of their interests (<http://www.adepes.org/-Forum-Regional-de-l-Economie-.html>).

In January 2013 the Hungarian network KIFESZ invited the RIPESS Europe executive secretary to participate in a workshop called “Local employment, solidarity economy and social cooperatives” organised in Budapest on the 10th of January. It covered the current and possible

future situations for social and solidarity economy and social cooperatives in Hungary. The executive secretary had the opportunity of presenting an exhaustive picture of the European network, and responding to participants' questions on the nature, the objectives and the activities of RIPESS Europe.

In May there was a visit to the Romanian network, CRIES, with 2 consecutive conferences organised in Timisoara on the 16th and 17th May, corresponding to two international projects in which CRIES was the leading project. The first, called "Social and solidarity economy practices with growth potential in Romania", concerned the project of promoting social economy called "Models of good practice in Social Inclusion". The second was called "Mobilising local resources for the development of an inclusive society" dealt with the project – built under the auspices of the Council of Europe – on the use of the SPIRAL method to facilitate participatory social planning in rural communities.

The RIPESS Europe executive secretary was able to participate as a speaker in the first of these conferences, with a presentation on "The role of RIPESS Europe in developing an alternative economic model". He was also able to present the network to the Romanian SSE actors at this event and to contact other Romanian SSE actors (SOROS Foundation Romania, the association ViitorPlus, and NGO Apel) in the course of his visit to Bucharest at the social economy fair that was held in the capital on 18th and 19th of May.

Both the executive secretary and the communication coordinator of RIPESS took part in the meeting of the Coordination Committee of the Coordinamento Nazionale Comunità di Accoglienza (CNCA) in Brussels in May. This enabled them to explore the possibilities and means of working with the Italian network within RIPESS Europe.

- **The bi-monthly publication of a newsletter** in both English and French enables the different activities of the member networks to be shared on a regular basis with a wider public – the newsletter is now mailed to about 3000 people. As well as network updates, the RIPESS Europe newsletter also informs people on European social and solidarity events. 6 newsletters have been published at the time of writing of this report.

- **The facilitation of the website** (<http://www.ripesseu.net/>) enable us to share news and events to do with solidarity economy at European level, as well as identifying and posting experience and good practice. There is a link towards a subscription form to the RIPESS Europe newsletter, information on network members and their activities, as well as a form to request to join the network. There is also an on-line library where academic articles and books are published, and a list of definitions of key concepts linked to solidarity economy as well as mapping of European solidarity economy, and discussion fora with free access. Recently one a section was added on all the information and essential documents for the RIPESS Europe congress.
- **Organisation of the RIPESS Europe Coordinating Committee meetings.** Since July 2012, 5 Skype meetings were held, as well as a face-to-face meeting 14th-16 January 2013 at the headquarters of PLIP-Centrale dell'Altraeconomia in Mestre-Venice. A second CoCo meeting was held in Paris on 4th and 5th April, at the UFISC headquarters. These meetings enabled the members of the Coordinating Committee to evaluate the activities of their networks, discuss the Europe and evaluate the financial situation. It also allowed follow-up to be done on the working groups that had been created at the Founding Congress in Barcelona, and initiate the preparation for the workshops that will be presented at the General Assembly in July. Furthermore the internal and external communications' strategy of the network was clearly defined, particularly in terms of the contents, languages and periodicity for publishing the newsletter. Practical issues concerning the governance of the network were discussed, and preparation for the second congress of RIPESS Europe carried out. Representatives of RIPESS-Europe to the World Social Forum and workshops moderated by RIPESS Europe were defined, as well as adopting a position on the pre-programme for the intercontinental Assembly of RIPESS Intercontinental for October 2013.
- **Creation of an open RIPESS Europe Facebook page** that enables instant, democratic dialogue and communication of ideas, proposals, sharing of articles, information and news as well as events on solidarity economy at local, European and intercontinental levels.

- Identification of and contact with new networks:** Portuguese networks A3S and CONECTAR-Desenvolvimento et economia solidaria, the German IQCONSUL and Italian CNCA and Tavolo RES. This allows us to be optimistic as to the enlargement and strengthening of the network. The objective of enlarging towards Easter Europe is more difficult to achieve.
- **The participation of RIPESS Europe in the World Social Forum** in Tunis was an essential event in the approach of increasing visibility and internationalisation of RIPESS Europe and grounding within the social movements. Much discussion and planning went into the actions of RIPESS Europe, and they were decided in a very consensual manner. There were three workshops entitled a) The role of SSE in food sovereignty, solidarity with peasant agriculture and the fight against land-grabbing; b) SSE or the conquest of democratic economy and c) SSE and the organisation of solidarity among peoples. Most of the contents of the discussions during the WSF have already been reported to members and there were three articles on this in the April Newsletter.
- **The working groups** enabled the creation of a shared work dynamic within the network. All in all, six working groups were created, on six different themes that have evolved over time: the workshop on social services of general interest was abandoned due to a lack of means. The complexity of the issue, which is nevertheless a key concern, requires a level of availability and work that no structure could envisage without specific funding. In passing, we wish to thank the Luxemburg network, Objectif Plein Emploi who had committed to working on this issue, and which closed down for financial reasons. The working group on the alternatives to capitalism never got off the ground, and the one on European strategy was integrated into and included in the general objectives. The mapping working split into two groups, with a new group working on the “scope”. Another new group was created on popular education and a last one on employment. This now leaves us with: 1) Responsible consumption, ethical production, short distribution circuits 2) Popular education and training, 3) exchange of practice and how to build inter-cooperation between networks, “ State of the art of solidarity economy in Europe, 5) Employment and SSE and 6) scope, evaluation

and social audit. All the groups have evolved into workshops that will be developed during the Congress.

- As well as the working groups, **the RIPESS Europe General Assembly** has been involved in a series of essential preparatory activities: drawing up a provisional budget, and requesting financial support from both public and private entities; establishing institutional contacts; organising an electoral commission to take position on issues of governance in accordance with our Articles of Association (new members, renewal of 2 of the members of the Coordinating Committee, renewal of the 2 representatives of RIPESS Europe to the Board of Administration of RIPESS Intercontinental, as well as 3 members to the Coordination Secretariat. It also involves contacting and sending out invitations to attend to all contacts, proposing speakers for the round tables, organising interpretation, the programme and the timing of the General Assembly, registrations, catering as well as the accommodation to meet all needs.
- RIPESS Europe has also been taken part in developing the programme for the **5th meeting of the globalisation of solidarity**, scheduled to take place in Manila 14th – 17th October next. The Programme Committee has involved representatives for all the continental branches of RIPESS to this effect. This Committee has held at least 5 Skype meetings, and successfully discussed the proposals made by all the continents to build a programme on the basis of consensual discussion. RIPESS Europe took part in all these Committee meetings, to enrich the discussion with our proposals. Some representatives of RIPESS Europe took part in the International Social and Solidarity Economy Forum in October 2011 in Montreal, in the Asian Forum for Solidarity Economy in Kuala Lumpur in November 2011, in RIO+20 in June 2012. RIPESS Europe also participated in a working group on the intercontinental concept of social and solidarity economy. In May 2013 various members of RIPESS Intercontinental (including several from RIPESS Europe) participated and presented papers and the network in a very interesting conference on Social and Solidarity Economy jointly organised by the ILO and UNRISD in Geneva. This opens some very exciting perspectives in terms of inter-UN

agency work on SSE, and also the implication of RIPESS in future processes.

- **Diversifying sources of funding** has also been a key part of the daily concerns for RIPESS Europe's activity. Various European projects - Grundtvig, Leonardo, Training for Life, Europe for Citizens, PROGRESS as well as a project funded by the EU delegation in the Philippines – were all examined. RIPESS Europe was also considered as a partner in the FairPlay European project submitted in January 2013. Unfortunately the selection committee did not validate the project.
- **The executive secretary of RIPESS Europe participated in the inter-parliamentary group meeting of European Parliament** in Brussels on the 6th September helped gain a clear understanding of what is currently at stake in the debate within the European Institutions and also the difficult relationship between the European Commission and the interests of social and solidarity economy, particularly on social services of general interest and State aid, the question of public markets related to social services of general interest. Social and solidarity enterprises are directly affected in both cases and demand that their specificities be taken into consideration in terms of the regulations on competitiveness. In both cases, the European Commission has not foreseen any particular dispositions under the Treaty on Social Services of General Interest. The most important aspects of these debates in the European Parliament has already been reported back to the RIPESS Europe in an article on the Luxemburg newspaper the Tabblatt (c.f. annex 6), as well as in the 3rd RIPESS Europe newsletter.

There are obviously still many challenges ahead for RIPESS Europe. The first of these is without any doubt to raise additional funding from new sources, to guarantee the same level of activity as in the past two years. Expansion should be pursued as well as a greater participation on the part of the members. Field visits are a useful way of linking local preoccupations to the reality of a European network.

Barcelona – June 2013

