



RIPESS EUROPE – Activity Report 2013

*RIPESS Europe-Solidarity Economy Europe defined its objectives and work program during its founding congress, held in Barcelona in September 2011, which served as a basis for establishing a Convention with the **Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation for the Progress of Man**, on 19 June 2012. These objectives were reformulated during a meeting of the Coordination Committee (CoCo) on 6 and 7 February 2012 in Chãos (Portugal). CoCo also met on 15 January 2013 in Venice, on 6 April 2013 in Paris, on 17 September 2013 in Barcelona, on 11 November 2013 in Florence and several times by Skype. The Congress was held in Lille on 5 and 6 July 2013.*

Reminder of the objectives for 2012-2013:

- **Animation of the network:**

Give more visibility to the networks, actors and experiences of solidarity economy (indoor and outdoor visibility) at the European level. Expand the existing network to Northern Europe and East in order to achieve greater cultural and linguistic diversity. Develop and promote economic cooperation between networks and actors of the SSE.

- **Analysis and proposals:**

Share experiences and best practices, build common projects, develop a collective intelligence and build a common voice.

- **Share of ideas and advocacy:**

In the phase of reinforcing the network, the primary purpose of RIPESS Europe is not lobbying in Brussels. However, it maintains the link with the European and International Institutions based on current necessities and interests.

The first action taken by RIPESS Europe to achieve its goals was to recruit Pol Vidal as Executive Secretary in a temporary contract (see CV attached in Annex 1), from July 2012 to December 2013, with the idea of making a step forward both in quantitative and qualitative terms during the consolidation phase of the network.

Since July 2012 the action of RIPESS Europe has focused on strengthening the links between the founding members of the European branch of RIPESS and those of other continents. The aim is to foster visibility to the social and solidarity economy at European level, as well as intersect with other social movements that advocate for a radical and long-term change of our society.

RIPESS Europe believes in a sense of commitment to the political project for social

economy. By relying on a common project, structured at the intercontinental level, the chances to be recognized as an actor capable of challenging European institutions and policy makers will increase.

These goals were realized through the combined effects of field visits and the participation to the relevant events of members that are part of the RIPESS network. Along with that the bimestrial publication of the newsletter, the participation to meetings of the Social Economy Intergroup of the European Parliament, the creation of a website containing innovative experiences and best practices of the European social economy, also have played a role. Other actions encompass the meetings of the COCO of RIPESS Europe, the opening of a Facebook group, the creation of contacts with prospective members of Northern and Eastern Europe, the participation to the World Social Forum in Tunis, the activation of the working groups, as well as the involvement in the programming of the 5th meeting on the globalization of solidarity that took place in Manila in October 2013. The stated goal is indeed to exit from a condition of isolated organizations in order to find alliances and complicity beyond their borders. Exchanges have thus shaped the modes of action. Governance structures have been organized, including strategies to make visible networks and experiences and establishing different possible relationships with governments and society.

Internal network activity RIPESS Europe

- The **field visits** have enabled a precise diagnosis of the needs and expectations of each network encountered as well as the state of the solidarity economy in the visited countries. A total of six site visits were conducted by the Executive Secretary and seven networks have been met: the Catalan network (XES), the network of the region Midi-Pyrénées (ADEPES), the sectorial network P'ACTS Europeans, the Hungarian national network (KIFESZ) the Sesterzo regional network, the Italian-sector network Urgenci, the Romanian network CRIES and the Italian network CNCA.
- **The participation of the Executive Secretary of RIPESS Europe to key events of some network members** (Budapest in January 2013, Timisoara in May 2013, Barcelona in October 2013), has better spread the message of RIPESS Europe. In May, the Executive Secretary and coordinator of RIPESS Europe attended the meeting of the Coordination Committee of *Coordinamento Nazionale Comunità di Accoglienza (CNCA)* in Brussels, which explored the possibilities of an Italian collaboration with and participation to the network RIPESS Europe.
- The **bimestrial publication of a newsletter** in two languages, English and French, provides a regular dissemination of activities of the various members to a wide public. There are now about 3,000 recipients. In addition to news, the newsletter of RIPESS Europe also seeks to inform about events of European significance for the social and solidarity economy. Five newsletters were published in 2013
- The **creation of a website** (<http://www.ripesseu.net/>) allows to share and disseminate events and news about the European social economy, tracking and displaying experiences and good practices. It also provides the link to subscribe to our newsletter, information about network members and their activities, and the application form to join the network.
- **The organization of meetings of the Coordination Committee of RIPESS Europe.** A meeting of the COCO was held in Mestre-Venice from 14th to 16th January 2013, at the

headquarters of *the Centrale dell'Altraeconomia PLIP*. A second meeting of COCO took place in Paris on 4th and 5th April, at the headquarters of UFISC. It was devoted almost entirely to the organization of the second Congress of RIPESS Europe. A fourth meeting took place on the 4th July 2013 in Lille, at the headquarters of the EPAS, the House of Solidarity Economy. The fifth meeting of the COCO was held in Barcelona on 16 and 17 September 2013. Finally, the sixth meeting was held in Florence on 11 and 12 November 2013. Moreover, interim meetings of the COCO are carried out via Skype.

- The creation of a **RIPESS Europe Group on the social network Facebook** allows an instant communication and an open share of ideas and proposals, articles, information on news and events concerning solidarity economy at the local, European and Intercontinental level.
- **Exploring and making linkages with other European networks** has brought advantages and three new members have joined RIPESS Europe during the General Assembly of July 2013 in Lille: the Occitan ADEPES, the Forum Solidarische Ökonomie based in Berlin and AFTER GE from Geneva. In addition, contacts are under way with the Portuguese network *A3S Conectar-Desenvolvimento and economia solidaria*, as well as the German IQCONSULT and the Italian CNCA and Tavolo RES. This makes us optimistic about the expansion of the network in these Countries. By contrast the aim to expand the network to Eastern Europe struggles to be concretized. The idea of relying on existing members of Urgenci in these countries is being explored.
- **The working groups have favored a dynamic collaboration within the network members.** In total, five working groups were more or less active in 2013: 1) responsible consumption, ethical production and short distribution chains, 2) public education and training, 3) sharing of best practices and building inter-cooperation within the network, 4) state of the art of the solidarity economy in Europe and 5) identity scope, evaluation, social audit.
- **Creation of Advisory Board.** In order to create additional support to the COCO and allow a deeper reflection on long term strategies, the creation of an advisory board of RIPESS Europe was proposed (see separate document).
- **The II Congress of RIPESS Europe** was held from 5 to 6 July 2013 in Lille. It counted the participation of over 100 people from three continents. It was structured in two plenary sessions, and some thematic activities carried out through 5 workshops and a General Assembly.

The **Plenary Session on public policies in favor of the SSE** had the purpose to understand what are the issues encountered transnationally in terms of relationship between public authorities and social economy. This leads to the question about the possibility of international comparisons of emerging public actions for solidarity economy. The hypothesis of the extreme heterogeneity of the European SSE has been well highlighted and spatial-temporal variations in national, regional and local levels have been underlined. Thus there are Countries where the SSE has a favorable legislative framework, it is present in the institutions and receives financial support from the State or from its decentralized services in the Region. By contrast, there are Countries in which the SSE remains invisible to the institutions. Here instruments to support the SSE struggle to be implemented. In other contexts these public policies are still under construction.

The **Plenary Session on the future of the SSE in Europe** has enabled a diagnosis of the social economy in the current social and economic framework. This model, characterized by a gradual collapse of the "welfare state" and his protective wall, allows to place the new social economy at the center of political struggles to the extent that it becomes a tool used by the disadvantaged classes in their fight against pauperism and exclusion. Therefore the social economy is seen more as a concrete and direct way to improve the conditions of the poorest, regaining areas neglected by public authorities. In this way its importance will only continue to grow.

- A document "diagnosis and proposals for RIPESS Europe" was written by the COCO in the early September of 2013 (see separate document).
- The search for funding to ensure the continuity of the actions initiated by the RIPESS Europe as well as the diversification of funding sources have been also part of the daily concerns of RIPESS Europe.

Actions towards the international activity of RIPESS Europe, the relations with social movements and European institutions

- In May 2013, several members of RIPESS Intercontinental (and among them several of RIPESS Europe) participated, presented papers and introduced the network at the conference on the social and solidarity economy organized jointly by the ILO and the UNRISD in Geneva.
- The participation of RIPESS Europe at the World Social Forum held in Tunis in 2013 was a key event in the process of gaining visibility and internationalization of RIPESS Europe as well as in its process of anchorage to social movements. The actions that RIPESS Europe should adopt with the IMF have been extensively debated and a broad consensus has been achieved. Thus, a delegation of three members represented RIPESS Europe, which has contributed to the debate by carrying out four workshops: a) The role of the SSE in food sovereignty, including solidarity with peasant agriculture and fight against land grabbing; b) The SSE in the conquest of economic democracy; c) The SSE and the establishment of solidarity between people; d) the workshop "Organizing the revolution of the solidarity economy networks and local pacts" prepared by Europeans P'ACTS and animated by Solidarius.
- RIPESS Europe also participated to the 5th meeting on the globalization of solidarity that took place in Manila from 15 to 18 October 2013.

This Congress, organized by RIPESS-intercontinental, counted the participation of 3 delegates from RIPESS Europe. Kenneth Quiguer spoke in the Working Group on "Global Networking". Judith Hitchman intervned in the working group on "Experiences of SSE in the territories" and Jason Nardi in the working group on "Communication and visibility of SSE". P'Acts Europeans prepared an internet forum in three languages and co-hosted the working group on "Experiences of SSE in the territories" with the mandate of RIPESS Europe.

It is certain that RIPESS Europe has still to face important challenges. The first is to find ways to link in an effective way all the members of RIPESS Europe (there has been the tendency to work primarily with members that are representative of the COCO). The

second is certainly to find new sources of funding to ensure the same level of activity for the years to come. The expansion already underway should be pursued farther, and the participation of the members should be increased. Field visits help to do so by articulating local concerns with the reality of an European network.