



ripess
europe

Solidarity Economy Europe
www.ripess.eu

General Assembly meeting 2021

Activity report 2020

Systemic crises need systemic alternative solutions (and strong networks)

During the last three years (but the trend has been much longer), the biggest changes which have occurred in the European context have been a more visible environmental impact of climate change in many territories and communities, a weakening of democratic structures in several states (with repression of human and civic rights) and the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic, reflecting on all levels: political, institutional, economical, health and quality of life, trust and openness in society, social inequalities and sustainability. This change in context is also the consequence of continuously neglecting the interdependence with the environment and destructive activities toward ecosystems and natural resources, drastically reducing biodiversity and the habitability of our territories. The consequences are a deepened and general crisis of the financial and economic system, with its obsession with growth, which is generating rising debts and economic inequalities, deterioration of social rights and real participatory democracy.

The economic, health and climate crises are three manifestations of the same unsustainable system. The pandemic has brought to light all the shortcomings we have as a capitalist society, creating this global economic crisis we are suffering. We have seen that "stopping the wheel" has caused the collapse of the system, because there is no social fabric or safety net to sustain people if companies are forced to close when consumption drops.

This is the triple crisis: a capitalist, extractive and unsustainable economic system that causes a climate crisis, which worsens year after year, facilitating the direct proliferation of one health pandemic after another that paralyzes all economic activity. A radical change of course is urgently needed to create solidarity awareness and move towards other socioeconomic models that place the needs of people and the health of ecosystems above profit.

Regarding the brutal impact of COVID-19 crises on our societies, the work and operation of our network's members are taking place and running in even harder context than before the beginning

of the crisis, as many continue to be in survival mode and cannot continue to develop and cooperate as planned.

At the same time, the solidarity economy has fostered the resilience of people and local communities, who have found and rediscovered their capacity to overcome the emergencies and rebuild a future by resorting to short circuits and proximity solidarity, with a global holistic perspective.

RIPESS Europe's response in this context is a dedicated work and emphasizing of the actual and deep causes of this crises, insisting on the need to use real transformative public policies to mainstream SSE and not hiding behind a "new normality" in order to preserve the status quo of the "old normality". In this way, we are focusing mostly on the "Next Generation EU" recovery plan and on the EU Green Deal, as the most important policy plans where we advocate for investing public funds for real social, just and sustainable activities, projects and policies. Recovery plans should not continue to support the neoliberal system of providing more stimulation to excessive consumption or "green and social washing". Instead they should channel funding towards those that genuinely serve territories, economic democracy and citizens, and build environmental, social and economic justice through SSE¹. The prospects opened by the global crisis itself could also lead to a more rapid expansion of SSE in many territories where citizens have become more aware of the challenges of our times.

A movement of converging transformative economies

The network's mission to "become and embody in Europe a movement of transformation for a systemic change of the current socio-economic models towards more democracy and solidarity, and to impulse a movement of convergences in order to bring together many movements and forces, which are also established and very active locally throughout European countries" is still at the basis of our work. Throughout 2020 we have organised several online meetings with all our members to redesign our strategic orientations for the next three years, in light of the new context.

In order to better organise and respond to these challenges, we have adapted our structure and have concentrated on its consolidation, followed and supported by our activities and progress.

We can divide progress in three lines:

- First, during the first lockdown we immediately initiated with our members instant support and direct actions that have been improving peoples' lives in those early shocking conditions. This support needs to be sustained.
- Second, we were aware of the issue of not in person communication and isolation problem, so very soon in the spring we started to bring together our members, rising our educational activities with online webinars and promoting SSE as a solution on public events.
- Thirdly, with the aim to strengthen general progressive approach to the current crises and context, we started to work more on networking and joining voices with other movements and organisation which are in the line with our third dimension in the new Strategic orientation 2021-2023: "Creating new alliances and strengthen our existing ones, particularly in the field of advocacy and campaigning, both at the institutional level and with other transformative economy movements".

¹ See the "Joint statement on the European Council Conclusions on public procurement of 25 November 2020", <https://fairtrade-advocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Statement-on-EU-recovery-funds-FINAL.pdf>

Evaluating main achievements of the 2018-2020 period

In the last 3 years, RIPESS Europe has increased its presence in several more European countries and beyond, promoting regional events and supporting its members work in **Central Eastern Europe, the Balkans and in Nordic countries**. Russian connections were established as well and will continue to be pursued, as there is an enormous potential for SSE development, notwithstanding the many obstacles (both cultural and political) that are on the way.

As for the **Mediterranean**, relations have increased with some countries (such as Morocco and Tunisia) and new ones are opening (such as Turkey and Middle East), but there is still much to do, especially with regards to the recognition of SSE and the integration of the networks in structured activities of the network.

Partnerships have also increased, through platforms such as **Transiscope** (for mapping and interoperability) and the **Transformative Economies Lab** (with Transition Network, New Economics Foundation); with the **Transformative Cities** (Transnational Institute, Friends of the Earth, Habitat International Coalition); with the **Communities for Future initiative** (Ecolise); with **FTAO, Concord and other advocacy networks** (on EU elections, trade and procurement policies); with **Social Economy Europe** for the EU parliamentary intergroup; with **REVES** and other local governments networks, such as **GSEF (Global Social Economy Forum)**. Several common European projects have been submitted, where RIPESS Europe has participated involving its member networks or participating directly.

Other partnerships are being agreed upon thanks to the connections in these last years, building up to the **World Social Forum of Transformative Economies**, where RIPESS Europe played a central convening role (together with its Spanish member networks) and creating a new alliance of 25 networks and linking more directly and strongly with (eco)feminist economy organisations, Commons network, P2P Foundation and Remix the Commons, agroecological networks, solidarity finance and climate justice movements and youth groups.

We have also undertaken long term partnerships with some research centers and academic institutions, such as with the **Economic Policies for the Global transition (EPOG+)**, an Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree in economics, supported by the European Union. It offers a world-class integrated Master's programme on the (digital, socioeconomic, ecological) transition processes with a pluralist approach and interdisciplinary perspectives.

As far as **analysis and proposals** is concerned, thanks to the participation and co-leadership in European projects, aimed at training and promoting alternative education, original support materials and publications have been produced, in particular on **Vocational Education and Training**, on setting up SSE enterprises, Community Building within SSE, SSE Principles within cooperatives, SSE in practice based on Food Sovereignty values. Most of the documentation is published in 2 or 3 languages (English, French, Spanish), while in some cases it is also translated in other languages.

RIPESS Europe also participated – through its **Public policies working group** – to the co-writing of several appeals, policy documents and manifestos / platforms. Scientific research is being developed inside RIPESS Europe network, and in cooperation with its members. As many members have testified of the struggle to be recognised as transformative initiatives, the **Scientific committee** aims to participate in the visibility of social solidarity economy, and reinforcing the capacity to develop scientific work dedicated to social solidarity economy, based on RIPESS Europe members initiatives. The committee will help disseminate the **International Manifesto for Solidarity Economy**²: the manifesto was written and signed by scholars and researchers from various continents (Africa, America, Asia, Europe) who have been working for a long time with

2 See: <https://ripest.eu/en/international-manifesto-for-solidarity-economy-2/>

practioners involved in solidarity economy, to interpellate public authorities in regard to their support to this emerging economy. It was presented during the WSFTE 2020.

The different **working groups** are mainly coordinated through the **Coordination committee** and are open to members' members. While they might change throughout the years (and are renewed at every annual General Assembly meeting³), they are together with the projects the main spaces to work and implement the network's activities, within the action plan.

There are some **structural working groups**, such as strategy, communication, public policies, scientific committee, education. These have produced position documents, tools, events and webinars, depending on the different situations and contexts. **Thematic groups** have been working on aspects such as inter-mapping and digital tools and platforms for SSE, the common evaluation of Social impact / social audit / social utility, territorial cooperation (and trans-local cooperation), and youth engagement in SSE. Some where able to pool resources or started projects, while for others we are still searching for funding possibilities, depending the activities.

Reinforcement of communication tools and development of a strategic plan

While for most activities, the Covid19 consequences have been problematic and will still be for some time, for the possibility of improving distance networking and collaboration it has been an opportunity to upscale the use of digital tools and online platforms for cooperative work in a shorter than planned time. We therefore introduced new free software tools, in collaboration with **Dunia.cc** and **Framasoft** and are working on more sophisticated ones to organise common activities, peer exchanges and education, virtual meetings. We also improved the more traditional online tools, frequency of publication, referencing with other networks and reinforcing our existing knowledge repository **socioeco.org**. The communication strategy is going to improve further with the development of **economic cooperative platforms** (digital currencies and trans-local exchanges), which are planned for the next cycle, such as the **Smartketplace** one initiative by our Swiss members – and with further collaboration in common platforms such as **Transiscope.org** (for mapping and events calendars) and **Communecter.org** – as well as with **Communitiesforfuture.org**.

The next 3 years: our strategic orientations

While all in person networking events, trainings, exchanges, learning visits, press and live campaign activities had to be suspended in 2020, in the next years as the situation will hopefully allow to do activities which are necessary in order to animate the network and implement concrete actions, we plan to gradually improve the range of our efforts with a 3 dimensional strategy:

1. Promoting SSE ecosystems : strengthening (and multiplying) economic circuits and exchanges among the networks: regional, sectoral and economic dimensions. This means supporting the emergence of new networks and the valorisation of local SSE practices, their networking at the European level, and their economic inter-cooperation.

2. Recognition of SSE: advocacy, campaigns at European, national and local levels Continue the development and recognition of solidarity economy as an alternative economic paradigm, the co-construction of public policies, advocacy with an increased effort on communication and media.

3. Building the movement: through convergences, peer education, youth engagement Create new alliances and strengthen our existing ones, both at the institutional level and with other transformative economy movements. Among the major areas of development, we are going to concentrate and integrate in our work on the **solidarity and mutualistic finances** and **progressive philanthropy**, on **municipalist and community-led practices**, on the **future of work** (and it's present implications), on the **gender rights** dimensions and the **climate justice** movement building.

3 See: <https://ripest.eu/en/general-assemblies/9th-general-assembly-2020/thematic-groups-ga-2020/>