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**Working document**

**Strategic orientation 2015-2017**

**RIPESS Europe**

RIPESS Europe is developing and starting to have a significant impact in terms of building a more solidarity- and ecology-centred world. All over Europe convivial, democratic initiatives that implement citizens’ practice are appearing and flourishing.

This document aims to strengthen RIPESS Europe’s political message, and to embody and share it through a two-fold objective:

* **Commit to a systemic change** from the current socio-economic models and shift to one of greater democracy and solidarity
* **The determination to bring together the forces of change** represented by the many scattered movements. In spite of their very active work at local or sectorial level their energies and strengths are currently diluted because they are still scattered.

1. **The context**
   1. **Social and institutional crisis**

Our social, economic and environmental models are anchored in the desire for growth, and are supposed to guarantee peoples’ happiness. However they are in crisis. The globalised financial sector is increasingly disconnected from the real economy, and lies at the heart of all decisions on economic and social policies. This is largely to the detriment of the historically won benefits of the welfare state systems. **There is a global attempt by the neo-liberal forces to privatise our health and education systems as well as all the Commons**. Social cohesion and democracy are being undermined. This in turn leads to many forms of tension that are anchored in fascist and radical religious movements that are fed by all the exasperation and current lack of perspectives **at grass-roots level**.

The European project is also in an impasse. The hopes that were raised by the fall of the Berlin Wall, with the anticipation of building a third path between unbridled capitalism and totalitarian socialism, have now died. The European Union concentrated most of its efforts on building the Single Market through its Institutions, and neglected the citizens’ project of a Europe of peaceful peoples. This has led to many of the Nation States competing in terms of their tax regimes. Europe is also currently negotiating international trade treaties in the most secret of fashions **(TTIP, TAFTA, TISA…), as well as the Special Arbitration Tribunals, (ISDS);** this would allow an even greater place for free trade and support the interests of large corporations and investors.

The “social economy” vision of the market - that has nothing in common with social economy (!) - can be summed up in terms of timid steps in the direction of sustainable development, Corporate Social Responsibility or social enterprises that take over the management of social services without undermining the **current** destructive economic system in any fundamental way.

And beyond the borders of the European Union, we now see the cultural triumph of individualism and loss of collective vision, the Commons and of solidarity between peoples as well as the connection between human activity and nature. But we also see the renewal of solidarity values and grassroots solidarity in action as well as new collective energies. This is where the fertile ground for our work in solidarity economy lies.

* 1. **Citizens starting to organise**

Citizens are confronted by an economic model of the past that is based on the concepts of use of fossil fuels and growth, as well as the inability of policies to provide communities with concrete solutions. They are therefore reacting by self-organising and becoming involved in concrete projects based on “Better not more” and “Good relationships before goods” are some examples of updated slogans that illustrate these initiatives and highlight the pleasures of a different, convivial and collective approach. These shared resources bring talents, knowledge and skills together in an “open source” vision aimed at jointly building “buen vivir”.

All this creativity and talent concretely manifests itself in projects that reinvent cities and regenerate the countryside through organisations involved in services to people, renewable energies, collective transport, the organisation of short distribution chains oflocal peasant agriculture-grown produce from producer to consumer, community gardens, fair trade and popular education, ethical and solidarity finance tools etc.

So although the areas of tension we mention above do exist, there is also a growing awareness of the limits of the current socio-economic system. This is demonstrated through movements such as Transition Towns, the economy of the Commons and Solidarity economy to mention just a few.

There are also political parties that are trying to move an alternative political project forward. Yet they are still struggling at electoral level to capture sufficient votes to make a significant impact on renewing our **democratic system**. The same can be said of certain trades unions that are broadening their sphere of activities beyond just defending workers’ rights.

RIPESS Europe should consult with and anchor its work in all these forces for change.

1. **The objectives and vision of RIPESS Europe: Towards a shift in economic vision**

The economy is a political construct, and is everyone’s business. Rather than the “invisible hand of the market”, we prefer to concentrate on the democratic construction of a new social contract that takes the Commons into account, is based on solidarity – as the starting point and not a process of redistribution – and both individual and collective wellbeing.

We do not wish to reinvent all the heterodoxical economic theories or more-or-less effective constructs of socio-political models. What we aim to do is to try to bring together and articulate and use the new paradigms that are emerging, and that are grounded in shared visions of the political project of solidarity economy.

As a solidarity economy movement, our added value lies in our ability to build a citizens’ democratic economic vision, anchored in solidarity.

The following table is an attempt to summarise the various elements at play in this change of economic and social paradigm :

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Capitalist system** | **Social and market economy** | **Solidarity economy** |
| **Economy** | Based on growth and individual profit-making | Shared growth and redistribution systems | Degrowth, consideration of limits, rehabilitation of Commons and economic justice |
| **Social model** | Individual responsibility | Organisation of solidarity, subsidiarity, respect of human rights | New social contract based on co-operation, autonomy and solidarity and collective empowerment, **social justice**. |
| **Human rights** | Human Rights and freedom of entrepreneurship | Human Rights | New generation of Human Rights (citizens’ rights, Indigenous Peoples’ Rights…) |
| **Individual behaviour** | Individualism, maximising profits | Collective governance, profit-sharing | Community, altruism, connection with nature, personal change |
| **Gender** | Discrimination | Encourage equality and gender balance | Implementation of human rights and equality for all |
| **Business model** | Business based on capital investment | People-centred businesses | Unity of production and formal or informally co-managed collective services |
| **Market** | Law of supply and demand | Solidarity mechanisms | Decommodification of the Commons and social markets (this concept is currently being developed within RIPESS EU: fair prices, short solidarity distribution circuits…) |
| **Finance** | Speculation, private investment banks, pension funds, etc. that serve capital and operate on an individual Return on Investment principle | Co-operative banks for an improved share of income | Decoupling finance from speculation, ethical solidarity financial tools, social and complementary currencies that serve the common good and need |
| **Companies** | Limited companies and individual entrepreneurship and all forms of business based on capital investment | Co-operatives, social enterprise and all people-cnetred businesses | Co-operatives, Associations, NGOs and all kinds of co-managed and collective forms of enterprise |
| **Commerce** | Global, based on the balance of power | Mutualisation and social services | Emphasis on short/direct solidarity distribution circuits; fair trade, trade justice and solidarity |
| **Natural resources** | Destroyed and grabbed! | Sustainable development | Regeneration, preservation, re-appropriation of the Commons (air water, land and forests) |
| **Energy** | Fossil fuels and nuclear energy | Public services, accessibility | Minimum guarantee for all, renewables, citizenship, support for community initiatives |
| **Transport of people and goods** | Globalised economy – road, rail and sea, cars | Public transport and diversity | Public transport, ecological awareness |
| **Food** | Agribusiness and factory farming, land-grabbing | Food security | Food sovereignty, Agroecology, peasant agriculture, local solidarity partnerships |
| **Education/culture/knowledge** | Domination of the knowledge framework of the Global North, scientific knowledge and private education, uniform, mass culture | Public services | Local and Indigenous culture, popular education and awareness-raising |
| **Reference framework events** | Davos World Economic Forum | Mont Blanc Meetings | World Social Forum and thematic forums. **Recognition of the presence of civil society within the United Nations process** |
| **Indicators** | Stock exchange, GDP, CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility | Social impact, social usefulness | New indicators of wealth, collective interest, ecological indicators. |

1. **RIPESS Europe challenges and strategy: A solidarity-based peoples’ Europe**

All over Europe, millions of people are aspiring to real change. The cultural inhibitions and legitimate fears (of losing what little they have) slow down their commitment and transformative abilities. Solidarity economy and social movement networks offer credible alternatives at macro-economic level, even if they are still relatively invisible. Platforms such as Social Economy Europe have long been lobbying European Institutions for the recognition of plurality of economy; but their influence is limited and has only a marginal impact on the system. And although this is important, the only effect it has had has been to soften the ill effects of the outrages of capitalism. **Many** Members of the European Parliament are always receptive and willing to amend the major texts that are under discussion, but they **still** have no margins for manoeuver when it comes to influencing a genuine paradigm change. This is all the more so as the financial power of the corporate lobbies blocks all democratic processes. There is currently a dual pressure on the part of lobbies to impede citizens’ control by civil society and counter the progress that has been achieved at United Nations’ level. This is why we need to:

**a- Participate, develop alliances and build convergence between social movements**

The key idea is that while preserving the specificities and identities of each movement, we need to build synergies and joint strategies to call upon public political authorities. The Synergia project of convergence for a new political economy (this is a MOOC project) aims to do this, and will hopefully be renewed and extended.

Cf. film “Better, not more”: <https://vimeo.com/124550319>

b- **Call upon political parties, trades unions, and institutions and build strategies**

It is apparent in the institutional environment – especially in the countries that suffer the most from the appearance of a political alternative position that is fighting the well-know TINA (There Is No Alternative) – so dear to Margaret Thatcher’s heart that RIPESS Europe needs to find relays for their political project. Europe is not fatally condemned to suffer from a restrictive vision and must democratise the social aspects of its future.

Diagram:

* European social economy
* RIPESS Europe
* European co-operatives
* Urgenci Europe
* INAISE
* FEBER
* ENSIE
* WFTO Europe
* …
* Transition Towns
* European Coordination Via Campesina and food sovereignty movement
* Degrowth movement
* Commons Economy
* New Economic Foundation
* Peer2Peer Foundation
* ATTAC
* GEN
* EnerCoop
* OUIshare
* RESCoop
* Inforse
* Network of well-being
* …
* Women‘s Movements
* Indigenous Movements
* Trade Unions
* Progressive Popular Movements
* Consumers
* Informal Urban Workers
* Youth
* Local non-profit associations
* Environmentalist organisations
* Universities
* …
* Development banks
* WTO
* EU
* IMF
* Mercosur
* ASEAN

The fundamental connection should be the regeneration of democracy, collective discussion as well as the determination to develop negotiated, shared alternatives and join forces between countries to build a Peoples’ Europe of Solidarity.

The RIPESS Europe Strategy Group.