

2019 ACTIVITY REPORT

RIPESS EUROPE

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RIPESS Europe - Solidarity Economy Europe is the European branch of the Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of the Social Solidarity Economy. Born from the 4th meeting of Globalisation of Solidarity in Luxembourg (2009) and founded in Barcelona in 2011, it now has 45 members from 21 EU countries and Russia.

RIPESS Europe brings together European regional, inter-regional, national or sectoral organisations of the solidarity economy. It has integrated Socioeco.org in its activities to provide a tool for sharing and making visible documents and resources on SSE and transformative economies. A Scientific Committee made up of researchers contributes to the constitution of the historical and theoretical heritage of the network.

THE CURRENT CONTEXT AND THE FUTURE OF SSE

In a context of climate change, democratic crisis, loss of social references, RIPESS EU faces a paradox. On the one hand, the solidarity economy is increasingly seen as a credible alternative to the financialised economy that generates environmental damage. On the other hand, a system of recovery and "social washing" redirects funding towards initiatives that are far removed from the foundations of the SSE to the detriment of those that are really at the service of territories and citizens.

In addition, RIPESS Europe has initiated a vast programme to implement convergences between actors of social and ecological transition. However, this process can only really succeed in the long term and is very time and funding consuming. It is a promising challenge, but one that complicates relations within the movement itself. What is encouraging is the increasing number of EU countries that are moving towards SSE and participating in the network and the quality of the creations resulting from the members' initiative.

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RIPESS EUROPE'S COMMITMENTS

A. ENLARGE THE NETWORK, BOOST THE POTENTIAL OF THE FIELD AND PURSUE THEMATIC INTERCOOPERATION

The 2019 GA of RIPESS Europe was held in Lyon (France) at the invitation of the Deputy Mayor in charge of the solidarity economy, member of RTES (Réseau des territoires pour l'économie solidaire). It organised a day "Cities and SSE: practical policies to transform the economy". Several members of RIPESS intervened in the different plenaries and seminars and participated in the Humanity Dialogues by bringing the experience of SSE.

During the GA 2019 four new members were adopted - An Ait Eile Cooperative from Ireland, KSOE - Katholische Sozialakademie Österreichs from Austria, NETZ - Netz für Selbstverwaltung und Selbstorganisation from Germany, TPABA ("Grassroot") from Russia.

INTERCOOPERATION

One of the challenges that the network is pursuing is to promote and create the conditions for joint work between its members and with other organisations that may become members in the future. Several projects are carried out from member to member following meetings promoted by RIPESS Europe, such as the Fruits of Solidarity (Greece-Germany-Belgium-Luxembourg) or the collaboration project between Switzerland and Croatia on the development of public policies in several cities, with learning visits and financial support.

Other perspectives are under study, on the creation of shared tools to measure the social impact of SSE, the partnership in research and teaching project on macro-economics such as EPOG+ (where RIPESS Europe is an associate member), the creation of a platform for young people and SSE based on the experience of several university internships with the network (JeunESse!).

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COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS

In September, thanks to a small fund obtained by Fundaction, a "Co-mapping" meeting was organised in Paris, in collaboration with Transiscope and the Virtual Assembly, to deepen cooperation projects and interoperability of digital tools such as those on cartography. It allowed to organise a programme of activity towards the WSFTE on the subject, with several existing platforms.

The European ERASMUS+ projects are an example of what RIPESS Europe can do as a network, they reinforce the feeling of belonging to a network and allow to know what other members are doing. RIPESS Europe is working on 3 Erasmus projects:

1. ESS-VET2 is the continuation of another project that will be completed in 2018. A first training/action of the project participants took place in Bergamo, Italy, in October. The next phase will start in spring 2020 (between February and April), 6 RIPESS members are part of this project (Italy, France, Greece, Portugal, Romania, Germany). RIPESS is contributing to it in terms of academic input and promotion.

2. BUSSE - Building Up SSE is focused on the development of culture and SSE networks in Central Eastern Europe. The partners are Slovakia, Poland, Austria and Czech Republic. Community building, food necessity in agro-economy, cooperation and establishment or transformation into SSE are the 4 topics addressed in the project.

3. Employ ESS (promotion of employability through SSE) is another ERASMUS project in Greece, France, Czech Republic, Croatia, Italy. Although a lot of work has been done on the positive social effects of SSE, less attention has been paid to the positive effect of SSE on employability, while today the SSE sector provides paid employment to 6.3% of the working population in EU-28, compared to 6.5% in 2012.

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AN IMPORTANT ISSUE REMAINS PUBLIC POLICIES AT THE LOCAL AND NATIONAL LEVEL

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The 2019 RIPESS Europe GA was organised in connection with the Municipality of Lyon in the premises provided by the City Council and by participating in an event explicitly dedicated to the inclusion of SSE in local development strategies. An exchange project between two members (ZMAG Croatia and Après GE Switzerland) is dedicated to the support of small Croatian municipalities in the implementation of solidarity economy programmes for local development. In France, MES participates in the French Chamber of SSE, a body officially in charge of orienting public policies. In Spain, REAS is very active in the co-construction of public policies, either at local or national level. In Greece, DOCK became in 2019 one of the first official support centres for SSE thanks to the new law. The project on impact measurement is intended to strengthen advocacy with communities.

RIPESS Europe has also participated in municipal platform meetings, including Amsterdam99 and Fearless cities. We joined the 3rd edition of the European Policy Dialogue organised by the Global Social Economy Forum (GSEF) in partnership with the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) and the University of Liverpool. We presented our work based mainly on the theme "The Social Solidarity Economy: a driving force to enable the emergence of diverse future leaders", but of course linked to all important areas of SSE.

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PEER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

RIPESS Europe, in addition to the Erasmus projects dedicated to training, was one of the organisers of the SELT (Solidarity economy learning tour) which brought together in November (7-11, 2019) trainers from their RIPESS Int member countries (United States, Canada, Mexico, Japan, France, Croatia). The aim was to test an SSE training course accompanied by a field visit by the members of Cooperation Jackson, a co-operative which includes a land trustee, an ecological farm, a fablab, all managed by and welcoming the black community of Jackson Mississippi (USA).

We participated with a delegation in the Conference on Education invited by the German-Russian Exchange Institute organised in Saint Petersburg in September 2019. This enabled a meeting with several leaders of initiatives supported by TRAVA, a member of the network, and to start a work of promotion of SSE in Russia.

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B. REPRESENTING THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION OF THE SOLIDARITY-BASED ECONOMY

With the new European Commission headed by Ursula von der Leyen, we feel that there is now some hope of pushing for a more transformative agenda. Former Luxembourg SSE Minister Nicolas Schmit has become Commissioner and is oriented towards social affairs. However, SSE is not mentioned in the Green Deal proposed by the European Commission and it is one of the advocacy areas to come. We have started to work with other advocacy organisations, such as ECOLISE, FTAO and TNI, as well as with some of our members, to create a broad coalition and share common political objectives.

RIPeSS Europe participated in a campaign for the European Parliament elections in May 2019 with FTAO - Fair Trade Advocacy Office, CONCORD - European Platform of Development NGOs, SDG Watch, EEB (German organisation, Good food for all), CIDSE, Artisans du Monde. At the same time, we contacted candidates with specific political demands of SSE and invited them to participate in events in their countries (especially Greece, Romania and Poland). During the year 2019, part of the activities at the level of European bodies has been put on hold pending the establishment of the new Parliament and committees following the last elections. We participated in Social Economy Europe's campaign for the establishment of the new SE Intergroup in the European Parliament. Participation in the Intergroup is envisaged on the condition that their programme is much more ambitious, taking into account not only sectoral issues (such as third sector reforms, business models, job creation or public procurement which includes social economic enterprises), but also more structural change in trade, cooperation, climate and environmental justice, as well as finance.

More interaction and collaboration could be achieved this year with research institutions such as EURICSE (see the report on finance and ecosystems in SSE), CIRIEC and EMES, with whom RIPeSS Europe has had several contacts and participated in meetings and congresses. And of course with the RIUESS network of universities. Several members have participated in the two editions of the ILO Academy on SSE and we are working to co-organise an edition in Eastern Europe in the coming years. INEES will publish the Luxembourg part of the survey as a refreshment of the one carried out 4 years ago. "Social enterprise in Europe". Finally, the European Commission is developing new themes: citizen participation, circular economy, 17 regions are now involved in the social economy.

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C. ORGANISING CONVERGENCES

The major work on convergences began at the World Social Forum in Montreal and then in Salvador de Bahia. It was decided that the Organising Committee would be formed from the XES, REAS and RIPESS Int. with the aim of enlarging this group through a first preparatory meeting in Barcelona in April and a subsequent one in July, to establish the main lines of the World Social Forum of Transforming Economies of 2020, which took place during the last week of June 2020. Currently the Organising Committee is made up of 25 international networks and the Barcelona Confluence. Its main mission is to assume the governance of the process towards the Forum, which is intended to be diverse, transparent, democratic, collectively constructed, encouraging the participation of all the networks and maintaining links with other World Social Forums. Some members of RIPESS EU have organised Local Forums to encourage their members to participate in the WSFTE by taking up the 4 convergences of movements initially established, which will be declined according to the proposals collected in the coming months. These themes are the following: solidarity economy, commons, eco-feminism, agro-ecology, just transition, climate justice and including cross-cutting dimensions such as public policies, education, finance, etc.

The WSFTE is supported, among others, by the Catalan institutions and the municipality of Barcelona and RIPESS works on the local public policy dimension. The preparatory meeting took place in April with more than 400 participants from all over the world. The Occitania FRESS, which was a pre-programme of the Barcelona FRESS, brought together 1500 people, including representatives of 4 local authorities, who had contributed to the budget. Other preparatory events took place in several European cities, from Rome to Amsterdam, during the year.

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D. DEVELOPING A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY IN RELATION TO ECOSOL AND ALTERNATIVE MEDIA

The links between Socioeco and RIPESS EU are very close (see the Socioeco report in annex), with a function of monitoring SSE news and hosting information proposed by RIPESS members and other sources. There is always the challenge to improve communication at all levels, especially the online presence which is our main visibility tool. An effort to work on this with RIPESS Intercontinental is underway, joining forces for the website, the cloud (document sharing) and the Knowledge sharing and webinar platform.

First of all, it was widely stressed that a new internal communication strategy will have to be established, highlighting members' areas of competence and their activities by using videos and/or articles in the form of biographies (skills, expertise, field of activities, etc.). The common objective of these tools will be to promote cooperation between members (by themes or by expertise). The newsletter will also be redesigned in order to highlight certain themes such as political news, network actions, intercooperation, etc. All this implies a significant investment in terms of tools and work, with partnerships such as the one developed with Dounia.cc, FPH partner.

A part-time position dedicated to communication was created in January 2020 to better develop the network's internal and external communication. It is a question of ensuring the regularity of the publication of the newsletter, reviewing the website to make it more attractive and in resonance with that of RIPESS Int, conducting surveys among members to better understand their activity and encourage them to communicate, to use the social networks and independent and alternative media, etc..

A pro-active opening (started at the Berlin Congress in 2015 and the Athens Congress in 2017) towards alternative, cooperative and independent media favours the exchange of information. A working seminar was organised in Villarreux in February. The drafting of a common manifesto has not yet been completed, but some links are still alive.

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E. FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT IN ORGANISATIONAL MODES

A satisfactory legal solution has been found to establish an Italian legal representation which can directly pay the Chief Executive Officer. Working at regional level (in the Balkans, Central Eastern Europe, Northern Europe and Russia) poses new challenges for the organisation of the network, but also promising opportunities. At the sectoral level, we are making progress on the alliance with other networks on cooperative energy, responsible tourism, solidarity finance.

Finally, RIPESS Europe coordinates RIPESS Int. with a strong focus on the WSFTE, but also the education group (see above), and contributes with representation in international summits such as the Paris Pact for Impact and COP25 in Madrid, participation in platforms such as Transformative Cities.

CONCLUSION - OVERALL ASSESSMENT AND PERSPECTIVES

In the context mentioned in the introduction, RIPESS EU's strategy for the next three years is as follows:

- 1) the promotion of territorial ecosystems and the support to the emergence of new networks by organising the valorisation of local experiences, their networking at European level and their economic inter cooperation.
- 2) pursuing the effort to develop and recognise the solidarity economy, the co-building of public policies, advocacy with an increased effort on communication and media.
- 3) the creation and strengthening of alliances, particularly in the field of advocacy and campaigning, both at the institutional level and with other transformative economy movements, will continue to be a strategic focus, with particular attention to the participation of young people and their forms of organisation.

RIPESS EU has to manage a certain change of scale linked to the widening of the network's boundaries and the themes carried by its partners. It is reaching its limits in terms of its capacity to meet all of these challenges by having means that do not allow it to finance more salaried time. Yet the network has achieved most of its objectives, even if there is still a lot of potential to be realised, which will be developed in a 2020-2030 strategy.