



International Conference “Unlocking the Potential of the Social Economy for EU Growth”

WORKING GROUP REPORT

On the first day of the Conference, November 17th, 2014, a total of 10 working groups (WG) were held to discuss relevant topics that had been previously identified via a public consultation. Rapporteurs and moderators produced individual reports for each WG and they are published as they were received, without undergoing any editing process. The reports are divided into five sections (Main recommendations; Starting point; Main issues discussed; Recurrent issues; and Concrete proposals) although not all of them were completed in all WG.

In addition to individual WG reports, a document highlighting the main recommendations from all of the WG is available at www.socialeconomyrome.it.

Please note that this is a working document, not edited for form or content.

WORKING GROUP 5: NEW TRENDS AND FORMS OF SOCIAL ECONOMY

Moderator: Jonathan Bland (Social Business International), UK

Rapporteurs: Giovanni Mazzanti (Aicon/University of Bologna) and Giulia Galera (Euricse), Italy

Speakers:

1. Arben Shamija (Youth Albania Professional Services), Albania
2. Davorka Vidovic (University of Zagreb), Croatia
3. Dzenan Saric (Mozaik Foundation) Bosnia
4. Gianluca Pastorelli (DIESIS), Belgium
5. Laura Jones (Social Service Europe), Belgium
6. Maria Juliana Byck (unMonastery), UK
7. Michele Mosca (University of Naples), Italy
8. Pier Angelo Mori (University of Florence), Italy

9. Stefano Granata (CGM), Italy
10. Sven Bartilson (Coompanion) Sweden
11. Andrea Bernardoni (ARCS), Italy
12. Letizia Moratti (San Patrignano), Italy
13. Fabio Laurenzi (Cospe), Italy
14. Vanni Rinaldi (Cooperambiente), Italy

Main recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is a need of designing effective modalities of engagement of new generations in the social economy. New generations sometimes underestimate both the long standing history and the potential of the social economy for developing new innovative entrepreneurial ideas. - National and European networks should be developed for: disseminating knowledge on the social economy; break down artificial barriers and support the achievement of economies of scale (consortia and umbrella organizations). Networks should be developed at three different levels: national, European and with emerging countries. - When dealing with policy measures, we should learn from the good and bad practices. Rather than transplant legislation and policy measures from one context to the other, national legislators should design specific legislations/policies tailored to the local context with a view to fully exploiting the richness and variety of the locally based social economy forms. Good practices at national level could inspire further actions in other countries. What EU institutions could do to support the growth of social economy is both disseminate and support the replicability of good practices. - Capacity building seminars and conferences should be promoted by both national governments and EU institutions to strengthen the knowledge of policy makers, public authorities/servants and practitioners. Key issues to be clarified should include the specificity of the social economy and the legal opportunities existing at national level, especially in countries where the social economy is poorly developed. - The role of social economy organization in the transformation and evolution of contemporary societies, welfare systems and economies should be acknowledged by regional, national and European policies with a view to exploiting their contribution to supporting economic, social and human development across and beyond Europe. To this end both old and new forms of social economy have a key role to play.
Starting point
<p>The moderator proposed three main questions to be addressed both by the presenters and the audience. Namely:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the bottom-up solutions that have been developed by the social economy to address unmet needs arising in society? 2. To what extent do such solutions rely on old forms of the social economy for developing new types of business? 3. Are public policy supporting/hindering the development of new forms of the social economy? What should be done in order to support such initiatives?
Main issues discussed

Both sessions shed light on the richness and variety of the new forms of the Social Economy organizations that are emerging across Europe to tackle key economic and social concerns. Such variety is enriched by:

- the different degrees of institutionalization and organizational complexity of the presented initiatives; the increasing new and innovative fields of engagement of social economy organizations (health, social tourism, use of renewable energy, production and delivery of goods and services free of charge or under costs for people in need; the reuse of confiscated resources and assets; urban regeneration, use of new technologies);
- the new business models that have been developed to improve efficiency, attract new resources and support scaling up (e.g. social franchising);
- the different governance models developed and partnerships/interaction modalities established by social economy organizations with private enterprises and public agencies.

Concerning the latter, various presenters highlighted the increasing hybridization trend of the social economy as a way whereby the investment ability of conventional enterprises can be channeled to strengthen social inclusion. To this end also consolidated organizations like social cooperatives in Italy are facing new challenges, which pay the way for the development of innovative experimentations with conventional enterprises. Most speakers emphasized the ability of the new forms of the social economy to fill gaps in general interest service delivery and enhance the social capital accumulated at the local level.

Recurrent issues that came up during the discussion

- The practice of the social economy across Europe confirms that such initiatives have often emerged and keep developing despite a not fully enabling environment. However, the subsequent improvement of legislation and policy measures –where it has taken place- has allowed for a dramatic scaling up of innovative organizational models. The need for an enabling legal environment was highlighted by various speakers of both countries with a long-standing tradition of social economy (Italy) and countries where such initiatives have emerged in the last decade or so (Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia, Macedonia, Kosovo and Albania).
- Many presenters underlined the importance of networks at both national and EU level to support the growth of the sector.
- Another issue that was raised by both some presenters and the audience is connected with the divide between the old traditional social economy and innovative initiatives that incorporate new forms of resource sharing (collaborative and sharing economy: what is its beneficial impact and what are the risks generated by this emerging mindset?).

Concrete proposals discussed

Several speakers and participants highlighted the following:

- social economy organizations should develop adequate management tools that are consistent with the principles and values of the social economy. (e.g. strengthen the cross cutting relational abilities)
- social economy organizations should support the development of new partnership with public and conventional enterprises (e.g. hybrids)
- gender balance should be ensured by social economy organizations.
- national governments and the EU should recognize the crucial contribution and originality of voluntary work.
- the specificity of social economy organizations also in the context of public procurement reforms should be acknowledged at local, regional, national and European level.

One or a few speakers:

- highlighted the importance of social impact measurement especially for social economy organizations.
- suggested that EUROSTAT includes the value of voluntary contributions and deletes the value of criminal activities from GDP calculation.
- underlined that a stronger coordination of public policies is required especially as concerns the definition of priorities of intervention.
- suggested that a social pact between the different families of the social economy is undersigned at EU level.

Should you have any questions regarding this report, please contact info@emes.net and socialeconomyrome@lavoro.gov.it