



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 8. COLLABORATING WITH OTHER ACTORS: CORPORATIONS AND TRADE UNIONS

Moderator: Thierry Jeantet (Les Rencontres du Mont-Blanc), France

Rapporteur: Laura Catana (Ashoka France), France

Speakers:

1. Elisabet Abrahamsson (European Social Franchising Network), Sweden
2. Gérard Andreck (Medess Association), France
3. Marco Tognetti (Yunus Business Center), Italy
4. Stefan Panhuijsen (Social Enterprise), Netherlands
5. Norbert Kunz (IQ Consult), Germany
6. Salvatore Vetro (Groupe Terre), Belgium

7. Sylvie Slangen (CEEP), Belgium
8. Eleonora Vanni (Alleanza delle Cooperative Sociali Italiane), Italy

Main recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New collaboration models should be explored, and examples of good practice in terms of sustainability and impact should be showcased. Rather than creating partnerships and collaborations for specific one-off projects, more time should be invested by the stakeholders in understanding each other's interest and finding the common point ie. the individual with his/her multidimensional needs and resources, in this way establishing stronger, long-term and more sustainable collaborations. - The plurality of actors and collaboration models have a great potential to strengthen democracy and should be promoted by all stakeholders. - Participative decision-making and governance systems are key both for the social economy organizations, for profit actors and within cross-sector collaborations, as they reinforce the goals pursued and avoid mission drifts.
Starting point
<p>There are various approaches, but what unites all approaches is that social economy responds to the need of people. In addition, when it comes to collaborations, there are five common threads that were indicated by the speakers and introduced by the moderator:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participation of workers, consumers, citizens – How do you see this participation and how to develop their engagement in the various types of organisations you represent? What best practices are there? 2. Relations - What is the relation between social enterprises and trade unions? 3. Social dialogue – Social economy must be exemplary in terms of social dialogue and could be a source of new social dialogue. But what is the meaning, what are the issues, your role and your experiences? 4. Internal and external cooperation – All speakers declared that more cooperation is needed between the various stakeholders of the sector. But what do you mean by this? What do you propose for cooperation? 5. Local and global cooperation – What are the roles of the states, town, regions, internationalization of social economy? <p>Speakers had a very diverse background and represented various types of organisations, for social economy, to trade unions, employers' organisations and international advocacy associations. Here some of the key questions they raised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to ensure the social cohesion issue is integrated in the society and companies, as well as in the modernization of the public administration which is also changing practices during the crisis? • Are we just trying to solve the problems/weak points of the system or are we trying really to change the system? The reply to this question helps define the types of collaboration we select. • How to ensure the sustainability of a collaboration? And how to develop the notion of plurality? • How can we inspire and get other actors to join: corporations and government?
Main issues discussed

- Collaboration is reinforced with the disappearance of the boundaries between the traditional sectors and the interest from all actors in generating social impact for the community.
- The needs of the citizens are multidimensional and the reply lies in collaborations / networks / clusters / chains (filieres). The various social economy actors need to come together and organize their work in an integrated way and have a common representation as well (eg. In Italy, Forum of the 3rd Sector). The point that should unite all these organisations needs to be the person with the various needs and potentialities across the lifetime. Taking such an approach on the macro level leads to the generation of social cohesion.
- What is the role of culture in solving some of the social issues we are facing? The difficulty of working in partnership comes from the lack of a common language, but mostly from the lack of trust.
- Leadership is very important in driving partnerships and starting new ventures. However, creating the tools for co-participation, engagement and collaboration with other organisations is key for furthering the mission of a social economy organization.
- Rather than hybridization of various models in one, more collaboration could strengthen democracy and pluralism on the market. We have a contracting/bargaining way of doing things. The real possibility to change things is moving forward from standards negotiation of partnerships on specific projects without discussing the real interests of the stakeholders to actually cooperating on the root issues – the person and his/her needs and resources. For this, we needed to contaminate the distribution channels from a cultural points of view – it needs to be a strong and active engagement. This is why reducing everything to one model could diminish the strength of the system.
- Examples of collaborations:
 - ReDialogue project led by Groupe Terre, gathering social economy organisations, universities and networks to develop social dialogue and industrial relations between partners.
 - European Mutuals and ETUC – relation on solidarity, insurance for employees – sustainable relationship
 - DIESIS AND TRADE UNIONS – social dialogue mapping in 7 countries
 - ENSIE gathers temporary integration and long-term integration of people on the labour market – for the 1st type it's essential to work with the for-profit sector so that they can integrate the clients after. The 2nd type of enterprises focus mostly on commercial partnerships – subcontracting, but it's not easy to find win-win partnerships.
 - Social Impact Lab in Germany works with professionals who act as mentors for new entrepreneurs. A recent evaluation of this partnership shows that the impact is not only on the social start-ups, but also on the mentors (volunteers) who get knowledge about the customer groups, new methodologies (design thinking etc.), access to specific instruments (e.g. crowdfunding, coms tools), opportunity to improve their own competences, access to new networks, access to other corporate partners, bridge sectors. So it's a win-win situation. As a result, Social Impact Lab developed a professional service (mentors and mentee profiles, matchmaking processes, events for mentors).
 - Social Innovation Society – works with those professionals who stay behind the entrepreneurs and support them in developing and growing their organizations.
 - UNISOC - There is a clear need for a EU level organization representing and defending the social economy organisations from the employers' point of view. In Belgium, UNISOC took over 16 years to get recognition as a social partner and become part of the discussion at the policy level, despite the need for the contribution of the sector.

Recurrent issues that came up during the discussion

- Multidimensional needs can only be addressed through collaborations / networks / clusters / chains. The traditional project-based collaboration needs to be enriched with stronger cooperation mechanisms, based on longer term goals targeting the person/ultimate beneficiary.
- The person with the relative problems and resources and talents needs to be the common starting point of every collaboration – this goes beyond specific interests and ensures sustainable relationships.
- Oversimplification needs to be avoided, as the plurality of actors in the market is of great richness.
- More collaboration strengthens democracy and pluralism on the market.
- Culture is the common thread – building trust among the various stakeholders is key for collaborating.
- Participative decision-making and governance systems are key: both internally in the social economy organization and within cross-sector collaborations.

Concrete proposals discussed

Cross-sectorial /transversal issues

- Social economy actors, policy makers and corporate partners need to learn from failure and success develop an evaluation on what worked and what did not work in partnerships/alliances and collaborations at local level and EU level.
- Create more opportunities for finding partners and promoting collaborations – eg. The International Forum of Social Economy Managers acts as an agora of projects where people find partners.

Social economy actors

- The social economy sector should have a unique voice and be able to influence the development of public policy while maintaining the identity as a sector and the principles and values which ensure quality of services and products.
- The social economy actors should offer policy makers information about the gaps in the current legislation and provide them with empirical evidence so that they can base the policy on real experiences.
- Social economy organisations should publish each year/two years an evaluation of the social and civic efficiency based on individual social balance sheets. The Public Administrations could also ask for such reports linked to public procurement (Eg. Territorial social responsibility from REVES – done by local authorities together with the social enterprises)

Policy (makers)

- Policy makers and funding bodies should promote the scale-up and dissemination of social innovations through collaborative approaches with the objective of scaling the impact rather than growing social organisations in new geographies.
- A European Observatory could be created to gather data from the Member States which in turn collect data directly from the social economy organisations (eg. Observatory in Belgium).

Employers

- Social economy organisations should come together in a European employers' association and work towards the recognition of the value and specificity of their organisations. Governments and the EU should take position and support this in order to accelerate the recognition of such organisations.

Trade Unions

- Trade Unions should enter the Social Economy International Leading Group which aims to push for a favorable policy on social economy – 1st meeting in NY during the Gen Assembly of the UN on the 22 of Sept.
- Trade Unions should acknowledge the difference between regular employers and democratic / participative organisations and promote such models of governance.

- Trade Unions should open a continuous dialogue with employers and employees – enlarge the participation of the employees in the structure of the enterprise.

For profit sector

- Corporations should look at their own supply chains and see what their role can be in fostering social impact and what could be sustainable win-win collaboration with the social economy organisations.

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