

Training contents SSOLEIL project. SECTION 3

Local and Solidarity Economy Tools for the Local Level



**Cofinanciado por
la Unión Europea**

Section 3: Contextualization of SSE in Europe

3.1 History and Evolution of SSE in Europe

The origins of the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) in Europe go back to the 19th century, when cooperatives and mutual societies emerged as a response to the difficult working conditions resulting from the Industrial Revolution. In countries such as the UK, France and Germany, workers began to organize themselves into solidarity associations to access essential goods and services under cooperative and self-managed models.

Throughout the twentieth century, the SSE was consolidated with the creation of legislative frameworks and institutional structures that favored its growth. Cooperatives experienced a boom in sectors such as agriculture, banking and housing, and became particularly relevant after the Second World War when European economies adopted more participatory and social approaches to reconstruction. During this period, entities such as production and consumption cooperatives, cooperative banks and workers' associations developed, which served as the basis for an alternative economic model to traditional capitalism.

With the financial crisis of 2008, SSE took on even greater prominence. While many conventional enterprises faced difficulties or disappeared, SSE entities showed remarkable resilience, thanks to their structure based on solidarity and the reinvestment of profits in collective welfare. In the 21st century, SSE has been integrated into the sustainable development strategies of the European Union, with financial support initiatives and specific regulations that seek to consolidate its growth in different economic sectors.

3.2 European Organisations for the Promotion of SSE

Various organisations have played a key role in promoting and strengthening the SSE in Europe. These entities work in the implementation of public policies, the promotion of intercooperation and the defense of the sector before national and international organizations:

- **RIPESS Europe:** Network that brings together SSE initiatives at continental level, promoting transnational cooperation and the construction of public policies favourable to the sector.
- **REAS Red de Redes (Spain):** Organization that promotes inter-cooperation between SSE entities in Spain, promoting alternative economic models based on equity and sustainability.

- **RTES (France):** Network of Territories for a Solidarity Economy, which promotes the integration of SSE in local and regional public policies.
- **CRESS (France):** SSE Regional Chambers, which represent and support SSE entities at the territorial level, facilitating their visibility and promoting collaboration with government institutions and the private sector.

3.3 The SSE and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

SSE is closely linked to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through its principles and practices, it actively contributes to the achievement of a number of global goals, including:

- SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth): SSE creates inclusive and sustainable employment, especially in sectors such as renewable energy, circular economy and social services.
- SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production): Consumer cooperatives and recycling initiatives driven by the SSE promote ethical supply chains and circular economy models.
- SDG 13 (Climate Action): Projects like Som Energia and Enercoop lead the transition to clean energy, contributing to climate change mitigation.
- SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities): SSE works to integrate marginalized groups into the economy, promoting equity and social justice.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



3.4 Challenges of SSE in Europe

Despite its consolidation and growth, the SSE in Europe faces major challenges that limit its development:

- **Legal and normative recognition:** Although the SSE has specific regulatory frameworks in several countries, its implementation and recognition varies significantly between territories.
- **Access to finance:** Many SSE entities have difficulty accessing credit and financing, as traditional financial instruments do not always fit their business models.
- **Digital transformation:** Digitalisation is a challenge for many SSE entities, which must adapt to new technologies without losing their focus on democratic participation and solidarity.
- **Scalability and competitiveness:** Faced with markets dominated by large corporations, many SSE initiatives find it difficult to expand and compete without compromising their values and principles.
- **Incorporation in public policies:** Although the SSE is increasingly present on the political agenda, there is still a need to strengthen its recognition and provide it with more tools for its long-term development.

3.5 Opportunities for the SSE

Despite the challenges, SSE has several opportunities that can enhance its impact and consolidate its growth in Europe:

- **European Union Support:** Through funding programmes such as the European Social Fund and the EaSI (Employment and Social Innovation) programme, the EU promotes the growth of SSE.
- **Growing demand for sustainable models:** Concern about the climate crisis and social inequality has led to increased interest in SSE-based products and services.
- **Innovation in business models:** The integration of SSE in emerging sectors, such as the circular economy and renewable energies, offers new development opportunities.
- **Greater inter-cooperation:** The strengthening of European SSE networks enables the sharing of good practices, improved access to finance and increased visibility for the sector.

- **Incorporation into local development strategies:** More and more cities and regions are including the SSE in their economic and social development plans, favouring public procurement with criteria of solidarity economy.

3.6 Outstanding examples of SSE in Europe

The SSE has been successful in consolidating itself in various economic and social sectors across Europe. Some examples of success include:

Institution	Example
Enercoop (France)	Renewable energy cooperative with a participatory governance model, where consumers are co-producers of clean energy.
Fiare Banca Ética (Spain)	Cooperative financial institution operating under the principles of ethical banking, financing projects with positive social impact.
SCOPs (France)	Cooperative Production Societies, in which the workers are owners of the enterprises and participate actively in their management.
Community Land Trust (Belgium)	Collective land ownership initiative that ensures access to affordable housing and prevents real estate speculation.
Ciclofficina (Italy)	Network of community bicycle repair shops, promoting sustainable mobility and the circular economy.

These examples reflect the positive impact of SSE in key sectors and its ability to provide innovative and sustainable solutions to contemporary economic and social challenges.