



Strategic orientation 2016-2018

Working document

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 share it through a two-fold objective:

- **Nurture a movement for social transformation:** commit to a systemic change from the current socio-economic models and shift to one of greater democracy and solidarity
- **Empower a movement of convergences:** the determination to bring together the forces of change represented by the constellation of alter-economic 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.

The context

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 business” 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.

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, know-how and skills together in an “open knowledge” vision aimed at jointly building “*buen vivir*”, good living.

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 of local 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 trade unions that are broadening their sphere of activities beyond just defending workers’ rights.

RIPESSE Europe must consult with and anchor its work in all these forces for change.

The vision of RPESS Europe: changing the economic paradigm

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 as a process of redistribution - and both individual and collective wellbeing. We want to move from an extractive and destructive economy to a resilient and regenerative economy, where nature and its limits are actually taken into account.

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. We thus refer to the concept of embedding of the economy, dear to K. Polanyi. 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 some of the the various elements at play in this change of economic and social paradigm (other concepts are being added for reflection, such as: welfare, technology, property and citizenship):

Comparison of economic systems

	Capitalist system	Social economy	Solidarity economy
Economy	Based on growth and individual profit-making	Shared growth and redistribution systems	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, collective empowerment and social justice.

Human rights	Social corporate responsibility and freedom of entrepreneurship	Human Rights	New generation of Human Rights (citizens' rights, Indigenous Peoples' rights, migrants' rights...)
Individual behaviour	Individualism, maximising profits	Collective governance, profit-sharing	Community, mutuality, 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	Nodes of production/consumption and formally 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 needs
Companies	Limited companies and individual entrepreneurship and all forms of business based on capital investment	Co-operatives, social enterprise and all people-centred 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 and Third sector subsidiarity	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.

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 manoeuvre 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. RIPeSS EU is oriented in joining forces with those networks, projects and campaigns that allow to develop a common voice and a stronger message, extending the range of people involved. In the education field, an example is the Synergia project of cooperative learning for a new political economy (it is based on a MOOC platform) which will hopefully help extend the links with social movements and academia.

Convergence spaces such as the one organised at Solikon in Berlin or at other meetings involving different alter-economic movements are important to share our common objectives and to build the alliances on concrete projects and campaigns. RIPeSS EU invites its members and its coordination to participate where possible in events and platforms working on common grounds such as Transition Towns and Re-economy, Agroecology and Food Sovereignty, Commons and Open Knowledge, OUIShare and nonprofit sharing economy, Peer2Peer and Open cooperativism, Degrowth, Energy prosumer cooperatives, Solidarity Finance and Credit Mutuals, Fair trade, etc. as well as research centers, independent and alternative media outlets and think tanks that promote people-centered and self / collective managed forms of economic initiatives. Cf. film "Better, not more": <https://vimeo.com/124550319> . See the alliances and convergences scheme below.

B) Call upon political parties, trades unions, and and institutions to build strategies to promote SSE

In today's institutional environment - especially in the countries that suffer the most - we can see the appearance of a political alternative position that is fighting the well-know TINA (There Is No Alternative), so dear to Margaret Thatcher's. RIPESS Europe needs to find relays for it's political project. Europe is not fatally condemned to suffer from a restrictive vision and must democratise the social aspects of its future.

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, Nov. 2015



Alliances and convergences

FIVE STRATEGIC AXES

INTER-COOPERATION AMONG MEMBERS

Facilitate the exchange and activities inside the networks who are part of RIPESS EU

- Regional / EU Projects
- Exchange visits
- Panorama and mappings
- Trainings and peer learning

Communicating with a common voice at the European level

ALLIANCES

Engaging with other European networks, such as:

- Fair trade WFTO Europe
- Peer2Peer Foundation
- FEBEA - Solidarity finance
- Cooperatives Europe
- Social Economy Europe
- RESCoop (ren. energy coops)
- REVES and similar networks

Issues concerned are:

- Public policies
- Common campaigns
- Synergia - education

CONVERGENCES

Converging on common values / issues with other social movements for strategy building and positioning

- Transition movement
- Food sovereignty movement
- Degrowth movement
- Commons movement
- New Economy Lab
- Common Good Economy
- Right to the City platform
- ATTAC
- Ecovillages network
- Shareable / sharing economies
- Migrants and refugee movements
- Women's - gender justice
- Indigenous movements
- Youth groups engaged in SSE

Finding common grounds with:

- Trade Unions
- Consumers movements
- Informal Urban Workers
- Local non-profit associations
- Development NGOs
- Environmentalist organisations

POLITICAL / PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

- EU Parliament
- EU Commission
- UN agencies in EU
- Development banks

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

- Universities
- Independent Media
- Research centers
- Think tanks
- Popular education entities