

How to weave solidarity economy networks

Experiences in Italy and other countries



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Solidarius Italia
RIPESS Europe

RIPRESS Europe

RIPRESS (Network for the Promotion of Social and Solidarity Economy) was founded in 2002, in Quebec. The network aims to bring together actors and organizations of the social and solidarity economy sector at international level and contribute to the promotion of alternative modes of production, consumption, savings and exchange.

RIPRESS Europe was founded in Barcelona, september 2011 – after a two year process following the RIPRESS international meeting in Luxembourg, 2009. It has brought together the networks across Europe, both territorial and sectorial.



Solidarius

Solidarius Italia is a node of the transnational network "**Solidarius**", **based in Brasil**. Its founder is Euclides Mance, one of the main "thinkers" and promoters of solidarity economy.

It operates in a non-profit logic to create, qualify, strengthen, in Italy and in Europe, networks of cooperation and solidarity economy, while participating in the international movement committed to building a society for the *bem-vivir* of all.



Terra Futura



Solidarity Economy ?

A networking revolution!

Solidarity Economy ?

*Solidarity Economy recognizes humankind, both the individual and social being, not only as creators and producers of economic wealth but also as **co-owners** of material wealth, **co-users** of natural resources, and **co-responsible** for the conservation of Nature. The dominant system leads to the concentration of wealth among the few and the disenfranchisement of the many. Solidarity Economy strives towards producing and sharing enough material wealth among all in order to generate **sustainable conditions for self-managed development** of each and every member of societies, the peoples and the planet.*

Marcos Aruda, Brasil

Solidarity Economy !

*Solidarity economy designates all production, distribution and consumption activities that contribute to the **democratization of the economy** based on citizen commitments both at a local and global level.*

*It covers **different forms of organization** that the population uses to create its own means of work or to have access to qualitative goods and services, in a **dynamics of reciprocity and solidarity** which links individual interests to the collective interest. In this sense, **solidarity economy is not a sector of the economy, but an overall approach** that includes initiatives in most sectors of the economy.*

[Alliance 21]

Solidarity Economy: principles

The **actors** in solidarity economy networks work for the **transformation** of the conventional economic system, rejecting the logic of maximum profit

A new system of economy is re-created by putting at its center principles of **justice, fairness, mutualism, reciprocity and solidarity**. It is based on the search for **creative new ways** of cooperation between the parties, rather than competition. It encourages the **exchange / sharing** of **knowledge**, **goods**, **services**, **time** and **information**.

Making the Net Work

Making the Net Work

A network is made up of “cells”, its constituent units, of the **relational interconnections** and of the “flows” that feed them:

1. Flows of **communication** (information, tech)
2. Flows of **goods and services**
3. Flows of **values**, both economic and ethical.

Whenever two groups, two organizations, complement each other in an exchange process with other groups, in which one feeds the other in a interchange of diversity and mutual enrichment, then we have a network.

Diagnostics of value exchanges

One can speak of a solidarity economy when you can measure the impact. Through tools (such as the portal Solidarius.net) that measure inputs and outputs in terms of materials, products, waste to build new collaborative supply chains, that keep the "value" produced as much as possible inside the solidarity economy network (as opposed to private and public sectors).

Euclides Mance (Brasil)

author of "A Networks Revolution"

Making the Net Work

The notion of network allows us to **work with diversity**, and to make diversity the **force of change**. The networks are **self-reinforcing** through diversity: the greater the diversity, the stronger the network. Its strength lies in **weaving**, and in the inclusive quality of **ties** among its members.

Growth, inside a Solidarity economy network, does not mean becoming bigger: it means **multiplying** and **complementing** one-another; creating **more trust and value relations**.

Changing the economy in practice

Changing the economy

Solidarity economy is based on **local, short circuits (chains) of production**. The “short circuit” is a form of resistance to the long distance “globalised” economy, and to consumerism.

It means regaining the close links between production and territory and **re-establishing an economy based on relationship** and centered on **trust** and direct contact.

1st: mapping the potential network

WHO (Identity)

WHERE (territory)

WHAT (products,
services, means)

HOW (methods and
relationships)

Main actors

**Organised
Consumers**

Producers

**Financial
intermediaries**

Public entities

Consuming

In a Solidarity Economy network, consumers are aware not only of their rights, but also of the **implications of their actions**. They are “critical” and “active”, and look for positive qualities as well as who and how is behind a product/service.

But mostly, they organise together and try to interact directly with the producers (who are themselves consumers as well)

Consumers united!

- AMAP (France)
- CSA – Community supported agriculture (USA, UK)
- GAS (Italy)
- URGENCI network (eastern Europe, Japan...)
- Beyond local food: issue of numbers and critical mass for non food (energy, clothes, ICTs, etc)
- Transition towns, de-growth movements

GAS – Solidarity Purchasing Groups

- They start in Italy in 1994, in the region Emilia Romagna, to promote critical and responsible consumption
- In 1998 the first national meeting takes place
- Within 17 years at least 1500 GAS (www.retegas.org) sprout individually or by "budding" process
- Sizes range from 10 to 500 families, with an average of 25-30 per group.

Conviviality

GAS groups start by wanting to know and to share:

- Collective self-productions (eg. bread, soap,...)
- Internal distribution (collective purchases, individual responsibilities)
- Visits to local producers to meet them and know how they work
- Participatory guarantee system
- Participation in important moments (eg, harvest)
- Pre-financing and co-producing

Good, clean and fair

- At the same time, the Slow Food movement starts to promote and defend traditional gastronomic products
- Besides Terra Madre (international meeting of farmers and producers), Slow Food develops its Earth Markets to bring small farmers in the cities.

Producing

- Re-building local cooperative supply chains
- SOD – small organised distribution
- Consortiums for “marketing” and self-certification (eg. Arcipelago Siquillae, Libera Terra, Goel - Addiopizzo, ecc.)
- Special Sol.eco Markets or Fairs / events
- Permanent markets – eg. “Città dell'altreconomia” (Roma, Venezia)

Financing (and saving)

- Innovative micro-credit and micro-finance mechanisms
- Investments through the purchase of shares and / or deposits with ethical financial institutions (eg. Banca Etica, MAG, etc.)
- Sharing innovative practices for the use of money (eg. pre-financing);
- Local and social currency

Public authorities and solidarity economy

- “Green public procurement” in general
- Public schools canteens (eg. Coop. zenzero: fair trade store, catering, Gas support)
- Specific laws (In France, Spain, Italy...)
- Participatory democracy
- Commons management

Co-project / co-production

- Clothes: “Made in NO” (Novara district)
- Cheese: bio-factory Tommasoni (Lombardia)
- Bread: Spiga e Madia, 25 gas, 150 families, flour and bread production (Brianza)
- Oranges: Consorzio Galline Felici (Sicilia)
- Tomatoes and Apples: “Tra Passata e futuro” and BOM – buono ordinario mele: futures on apples (Trentino)
- Retenergie – 100 green (photovoltaic) roofs

DES

Solidarity Economy Districts

In Spain they are called Social Economy Markets

The districts of solidarity economy are "pilot laboratories" in which local experience form collaboration and synergy on the basis of:

Fair and socially sustainable economy: individuals belonging to the districts are asked to act according to rules of justice and respect for people (working conditions, health, education, social inclusion, ensuring essential goods and services);

Enterprises are encouraged to make equitable distribution of proceeds from economic activities (investment earnings for social workers locally and in the global South), with transparent criteria in pricing for goods and services.



Città dell'Altreconomia (ROMA)



A social network for Solidarity Economy

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An ETHICAL Bank?



Challenges

- In what way do solidarity economy networks relate to their outside, the capitalist economy? Are these external relations based on competition? If that is the case, how can solidarity economy ‘win’?
- How can we make sure that the expansion of solidarity economy networks would not mean a loss of its initial principles?
- And is the creation of jobs and incomes not more important than these ‘principles’?

Challenges

- What distinguishes solidarity economy from localist forms of capitalism? Or from the “Green economy”, or the “Third Sector”?
- How can solidarity economy make alliances with social movements, unions, environmentalists, etc.?