



Workshop 2

Social Economy and youth entrepreneurship for a sustainable and fair recovery

2 March 2021 | 10:00 – 12:00 | EESC - Brussels

This motivating and inspiring event was held on Tuesday 2nd March 2021 in the framework of the Civil Society Days, organised by the European Economic and Social Committee Liaison Group. This series of workshops ran from the 1st to the 5th March and this report details the main messages from Workshop 2: Social Economy and Youth Entrepreneurship for a Sustainable and Fair Recovery.

The workshop was moderated by **Heleen Heysse** (Cooperatives Europe) and **Víctor Meseguer** (Social Economy Europe).

The Opening remarks were made by **Giuseppe Guerini**, spokesperson of the EESC Social Economy Category and President of CECOP-CICOPA Europe. Mr. Guerini explained that his cooperative commitment began over 30 years before, motivated by a desire to change the world through social and solidarity commitments. While changing the world was not possible, changing the community was, by reducing the marginalisation of people with disabilities, those who suffer from mental health issues, those addicted to drugs and prisoners (among others). The **social cooperative** was the tool to allow this to happen and he discovered that this entrepreneurial commitment was the real power of change. He said the strongest potential for young people to transform concerns technological and digital innovation for an inclusive green economy. He mentioned that platform and innovative cooperatives are emerging as a tool for data governance, stating that what connects the new and generation regarding the urgency of cooperative development is the need to reduce inequality. Social economy enterprises are an empathetic economy, which is more important now due to COVID. He concluded with the song "The ghost of Tom Joad" by Bruce Springsteen, which says "*Wherever somebodys strugglin' for a place to stand, for a decent job or a helpin' hand. Wherever somebody is strugglin' to be free Look in their eyes ma, you'll see me!*" saying that these lyrics give the essence of the social entrepreneur.

The next speaker was **Ann Branch**, Head of the Job Creation unit at DG EMPL, European Commission. **Ms. Branch** explained how the social economy can be a driver for young entrepreneurship; since the idea of entrepreneurship has changed from being associated with pure profit making toward making a social impact. **Increased awareness of the social economy** improves how young people can see the combined entrepreneurial and making a

social impact, making this a more attractive endeavour. This is mentioned in the Commission's [youth employment initiative](#) from July 2020. Young people tend to have higher than average digital skills, which will serve them well in the new digital economy. She continued that CEOs of large mainstream corporations are calling for contribution to SDGs and for bolder policy makers, driven by the demand from younger employees. Young people want a sense of purpose, which demonstrates the power of young people in driving change. She concluded with comments on the **Action Plan for the Social Economy**, which aims to make the social economy more visible; raise awareness to create a dialogue with MS and policy makers; and identify support measures for the social economy. She gave the example of improving legal frameworks and help funding support for the social economy. This includes improving opportunities for young people and young entrepreneurial. She finished by saying that if the social economy is needed in the EU, then it is needed everywhere, as it provides inclusive and sustainable values, therefore the Action Plan will resonate beyond the EU.

The event then moved to the **Round table on Promoting social economy entrepreneurship for young people across Europe**.

The first to speak were **Juan Patricio Peñalver** and **Manuela Soladana**, teacher and student from a cooperative school in Spain. **Mr. Patricio** explained that at the cooperative schools in Murcia, they do their best to instil cooperative principles in their students. Through entrepreneurial education, they try to involve students in practical based projects. They elect representatives, take equal decisions, learning the values of democracy and solidarity. He explained that within the schools, the principles of the Agenda 2030 SDGs are also extremely important especially SDG 4 on quality education, and SDG 8 on economic growth and development. Additionally, they work on other models related to sustainability including human rights, and environmental protection, which is linked to the cooperative movement from its origins. He explained that youth participation in local public policies is extremely important, therefore they participate in workshops and markets of cooperative schools, supported by "Unión de Cooperativas de la Región de Murcia" ([UCOMUR](#)) and **Juan Antonio Pedreño** (who spoke later in the event). Mr. Patricio promotes a project called "I want to work without fear of the future". This has been awarded in a national contest, where students make a TV programme on entrepreneurship and sustainability. They get to interview inspiring leaders in different fields. At the school, training in circular economy, sustainability and mobility are complimented by digital training and the development of soft skills to build opportunities.

We then heard from one of Mr. Patricio's students **Manuela Soladana**, who explained that she has been involved in cooperative education throughout her entire educational journey. An open and flexible methodology is always incorporated adapted to the individual capacities of each student. She explained that students have participated in various projects, for example, one guided by UCOMUR, where students create their own cooperatives, and become entrepreneurs, establishing rules and laws that guarantee the correct functioning of the project. In these rich projects, the combined work and cooperation of all is evident in the final results. Ms. Soladana explained that providing a service to the community, active participation and incorporating democratic values are the key pillars of "cooperativism". Her dream is to have a career in diplomacy and international relations, where the skills gained in her school's cooperative projects will be essential for her to achieve this goal. She concluded by explaining that the cooperative schools have instilled her and her fellow students with the values of work and effort as well as the professional profiles needed for the future of work. She is grateful to

have learned how to turn an idea into a reality, look for opportunities, face uncertainty and plan ahead.

Nicolás Dimarco, Argentinian Federation of Cooperatives in the tech sector (FATTIC) was next to speak. Mr. Dimarco spoke about how his tech worker cooperative was founded 10 years ago and one year ago he founded his own cooperative. It was through this challenge that he saw the need to find support from other cooperatives; and so a federation of coops was created in order to provide support. He emphasised the importance of young entrepreneurs to join a federation, as to surround yourself with people in the same situation as yourself is vital. Together, he said, larger issues can be solved. He continued that a small group of young entrepreneurs in the federation are looking to form a space to create new coops or to accompany and support newly created coops. This is particularly important as these companies need to be competitive in the market, resilient and useful during a crisis. Values are of utmost importance; however, the company must thrive to provide the means for people to live.

Petro Darmoris, Chief Operating Officer at the Ukrainian Social Academy explained how the social economy is becoming more attractive to young entrepreneurs and there is a shift towards larger importance of social values over just profit making in the Ukraine. The Ukraine social academy offers training through mentoring, personal consulting and support programmes for young people wanting to become social entrepreneurs and start a special business. They support young leaders of charities and NGOs in organisation and development, bringing social entrepreneurship to the non-profit and teaching organisations to be self-sustainable. Traditional business is utilised to mentor organisations to be successful, as well as to offer impact investment to the business pitches at the end of training courses.

Mr. Darmoris explained that the number of social economy entities in the Ukraine is unclear and a mapping is underway to understand this much better. Additionally, he explained that cooperation with Germany and Croatia to produce the “social impact platform” helps impact investors and philanthropists choose the most interesting social project to donate to. The success of the organisations is clear through the 8000 young people educated, and 127 social start-ups generated by the organisation in 6 years.

Ana Aguirre, Co-founder and worker owner of **TAZEBAEZ** cooperative passionately explained that she was working in a cooperative named “**And why not**” (translation), a name which implies a challenge to take on any opportunity which presents itself. She is from the Basque region of Spain, which is rich in cooperative development and she studied in the first ever course “*Leadership, Entrepreneurship and Innovation*” at Mondragon University. Through this, her cooperative was born in 2009, which has gone from a university project of 7 people to a full cooperative of 50 people. She explained that she is part of the “Europe First” European youth network in the cooperatives sector. She added that “***the coop sector really speaks to youth, if the youth know about the coop sector!***” Her goal is to introduce the cooperative model to a broader audience. She mirrored the words of Nicolás Dimarco, when saying that cooperative values are at the heart of cooperatives, but that they must be excellent in management to be competitive. In the words of Mondragon’s founder **José María Arizmendiarieta Madariaga**, Ms. Aguirre paraphrased; it is great that we have cooperatives first, but we should have excellent businesses too, otherwise we will not be able to share wealth. She ended by explaining that the digital era brings new opportunities, highlighting the example that she teaches a course that one year ago didn’t exist. This course is attended by over 800 people!

Caroline Ferguson, National Coordinator of “*Mon ESS à l’école*” told us about the project “My Social Economy Enterprise at School” (translated), which involves the creation of a social enterprise by students between 11 and 18 years old with the aim of empowering young people, by making them fully involved in entrepreneurial, collective and socially useful projects. The objective is to promote the social economy, its values and methods through collective action; to discover the diversity in the economic environment; and to reinforce school dynamics, improve school climate, and the image of the institution.

Students have set up a diversity of cooperatives through the course, including bike repair coops, charity shop, local fruit and veg boxes, homework help groups and environmentally aware recycling projects. They also have a class which promotes homemade beauty and health products. They have invested their profit to invest in feminine hygiene products and donate these to an organisation that helps women suffering from domestic abuse. This puts into practice the values of the social economy (people and social objectives before profits, democratic governance and reinvestment of those profits). She added that the results of a study showed a huge increase in the interest in young people to do an internship in social economy organisations, with 54 % wanting to work in this sector.

This programme is a strong show of civil society as L’Économie Sociale Partenaire de l’École de la République (L’ESPER) brings together 43 organisations, associations, mutuals coops and unions acting in the school community.

The roundtable was concluded by **Brando Benifei**, MEP (S&D, IT), member of the Social Economy Intergroup who explained that the world is changing rapidly, accelerated by the pandemic. To combat the increased unemployment seen in young demographics, we require opportunities and enormous investment. It is often the people who need these most are those who lack access to internet, quality housing and to quality services. Mr. Benifei stated that cooperative entrepreneurship is becoming a strong and convincing answer to these issues. The resilience of the social entrepreneurship was stronger in the previous financial crisis. He explained that one testing ground is the gig economy and the organisation of online platforms. The EU needs to provide a regulatory environment that will allow the social economy to thrive in order to overcome this challenge. This means that the EU must enact the full implementation of the EU pillar of Social Rights. Mr. Benifei has worked on areas that directly affect the social economy such as the single market programme and the ESF+, insisting in the inclusion in the two regulations of improved access to funding to make this a reality. He insisted that the EU should monitor the progress of work to fully promote entrepreneurship models across the EU. He stated that we should make the best use of Programmes (ESF+, Single Market Programme, Erasmus +, invest EU and the RRF) to upscale and strengthen the model. He ended by saying that it is very important that we explain and inform the public of the strengths and values that cooperative entrepreneurship brings to society.

A strong closing panel was started by **Alicia Homs MEP (S&D, ES)**, Member of the Social Economy Intergroup, who explained that we are living in times with a combination of challenges, including climate change and demographic changes, leading to huge social change. She touched on how COVID puts future prospects of millions of young people in danger, stating that the social economy is fundamental in resolving these issues and is present in all economic sectors. She added that it is vital to mainstream the role of the social economy since it contributes actively to employment, gender equality and more. She spoke on how very close to 50% of people employed in the social economy are women, and this must be recognised. The role of the social economy is increasing, but we must increase the visibility of this so that young workers, especially women can find professional projects through cooperatives. Additionally, she stated that the social economy adds to the industrialisation and

inclusion of the economy, the green and digital transitions and slow depopulation of rural areas. She ended by saying that we must prioritise investing in social enterprises and offer the maximum support to young entrepreneurs and she welcomed the new **Social Economy Action Plan**.

Juan Antonio Pedreño, president of Social Economy Europe explained that by listening to the incredible messages of this webinar, he had recharged his batteries, with such important messages from inspiring young people. He commented on the transformational benefit of the social economy, leading towards a more just and inclusive society. Mr Pedreño addressed the important issue of gender equality stating that 47.2% of all employment in the social economy, with the majority below 40 years old. Additionally, he stated that the employment of young people in the social economy has increase 2 points in the last year. He added that we must not only speak this message to people who already know about it, but to the rest of the general public. This is what it means to increase visibility. In the region of Murcia, they are doing this by putting on large exhibitions of social economy organisations. He highlighted that the year 2021 will be a fundamental year for the social economy, with the **Action Plan** and the fact that the social economy is mentioned many times in European communications as a model to construct a better future, more sustainable, digital and inclusive. He insisted that we must use this window of opportunity and finished by thanking **Dr. Ulla Engelmann** for her outstanding work for the social economy in her role as Head of Unit at DG Grow.

The penultimate speaker was **Jean-Louis Bancel**, President of Cooperatives Europe, who explained that Cooperativess Europe is the representative body of all cooperatives in Europe and that cooperatives are at the heart of how we built Europe. He explained how the idea of entrepreneurship has changed from trying to get rich, as was explained earlier, but now things are moving, stating that we want this to move faster. He thanked the Commission and the Parliament for being involved in this hearing and then described how a new Commission advisor Nicolas Hazard, as a young person himself, could be an important person for our cause in the commission. Mr. Bancel explained that now is the time of the COVID recovery plan, Next Generation EU. This money will be sent to national governments and we must therefore coordinate to be stronger at the national level. He continued that Cooperatives Europe will try to help in countries where the civil society does not yet have the local institutions to press on national governments to drive EU money to the social economy sectors. Not all Member States are the same. He finished by stating that this is the right moment to gather and exchange good practices in these places.

The workshop was privileged to be concluded by **Ulla Engelmann**, Head of the Social Economy unit at DG Grow, European Commission as the final speaker. She explained that it was very motivating to hear these fantastic messages. She echoed the words of Juan Antonio Pedreño, that we must not speak only between ourselves, but we must speak in other fora. This is why the **Civil Society Days** are so important. She added that recently were the **EU Industry days** and that the message of the social economy was spread with workshops organised by Mondragon (the world's largest social economy organisation). Dr. Engelmann explained that if we want to raise interest in the social economy, we must speak to others. We must get this into curricula in schools, to show that is good entrepreneurial option. Awareness raising is the key, and she continued that we need to scale up the inclusion of the social economy in schools and universities. She explained that the Commission is ready to help scale up this effort. There is a [European Education Area](#) communication for 2025 released in September 2020, which shows that fostering transversal skills like critical thinking, entrepreneurship and civic engagement are key for the next generations to build a resilient society. Within DG grow they are preparing an action on

cooperative entrepreneurship with the aim of fostering this business form in the national education system.

Dr. Engelmann explained about Erasmus+ or Erasmus for young entrepreneurs, and that we must use existing tools to help the social economy. She also mentioned other initiatives such as Smart Specialisation, the EU Innovation council for start-ups. She explained that within the framework of the industrial ecosystems, (of which the social economy is one of the 14 ecosystems), they have created links on the [EU Cluster Collaboration Platform](#) released newly last Friday. There is a special corner for social economy clusters. New opportunities are added here and we are encouraged to check these out.

The event was a great success and you can find the full video [here](#).