



"Have your Say!" Event of January 16 - 17 2014 in Strasbourg

A short overview of main discussion threads

The Event brought together many partners of the social entrepreneurship ecosystem in Europe and worldwide, including policy-makers, public authorities and social entrepreneurs in their vast variety. This Event allowed the existing ecosystem to come (more) to life together – from getting to know each other, through engaging in personal and collective conversations, to co-creating perspectives for the future together.

The purpose of this overview document is to present a summary of threads and patterns emerging from the contents of the Event. It does not have the ambition to be a complete record of everything that was spoken. The attached excel document gives many examples of quotes that gave rise to the various themes and patterns mentioned here. The order of ideas here is not of prime importance, it is only meant to make the weaving of the threads easier.

1. Social Entrepreneurship (SE) is helpful in times of crisis

Europe – and the world in general - cannot come out of the current crisis in the same way as it entered it; the crisis is a transformative experience in itself. SEs have demonstrated, thanks to their values and way of doing business (though some do not even consider that they are doing business) that they are resilient in times of crisis and propose solutions, which can move economy and society forward. They create jobs and hope for the future, proposing a more value-driven perspective of professional life, very much appreciated nowadays. Conversations around SE also help us to see the limitations of separating economy and society, of seeing them as a paradox; economy is there to serve members of society, they should not be seen as opposites, but as partners, together with politics.

2. SE and public authorities should work in real partnership

Throughout the whole Event, a clear call for creating together the future of policies concerning SE has been made; often accompanied by strong concerns – almost in warning mode – about SE replacing the failing state in its welfare/social obligations, which is not its purpose. Some claimed that the politicians and the state should "get out of the way" of SE, however the invitation to work strongly together was more present. It is urgent to co-create as a true ecosystem, through participatory and collaborative processes. Examples of prototyping this co-creation were quoted, e.g. the city of Strasbourg itself and its social entrepreneurs.



For this to work, public authorities should learn more about SE and work more with it, e.g. by making the utmost of SE in public procurement, maximising the chances of public money being spent for common good (see also legal framework and awareness raising below).

3. Diversity, definitions and branding

The question of what defines a SE - if a definition is needed at all - and how to differentiate SE from other forms of business (provided one agrees SE is a form of business, which is not what all SEs claim), was very present. One of the major differences with mainstream business is that social enterprises are not interested in creating more needs in customers; on the contrary, they work for existing and real needs to diminish (ex. working for the homeless – the goal is to have less homeless people, not more). The logic of profit distribution is another big difference.

The discussion around terminology goes from showing the benefits of having a reference framework, including for research and impact-assessment purposes, on one hand; to the risk of locking the definition too tight and excluding some SE out of the field, especially in local contexts on the other hand. Another point of discussion remained how far SE and mainstream business can get closer to each other without SE compromising its values and without risking being high-jacked by traditional companies. Also, when growing and changing the scale of work, SEs may risk following mainstream models.

On several occasions, the need to protect a SE "brand" or "label" was mentioned and proposals were made to provide one at EU-level. At the same time, there already are many national/local labels, so any new proposal has to be taken cautiously to avoid further confusion.

4. Creating, developing, and adapting an appropriate legal framework

There is a need and a demand for a more enabling and supporting legal framework – the goal is not just to regulate, but to create conditions for SE to be able to work and bring their best contribution. There is a huge diversity of forms, sizes etc. of SE across Europe, so the legislators need to tread carefully, including bearing in mind the dangers of too narrow a definition.

A few delicate/important sectors where a more enabling legal framework is needed were quoted: tax policy, public procurement, financial models... At European level, making sure that existing legal framework is implemented well throughout the Union has been identified as a strong challenge (Eastern Europe has been quoted as a more challenging zone).



5. Financing, especially innovative solutions

Conversations on financing took two main directions: how to access existing funds and how to create new solutions, adapted to SE needs.

SE have difficulties accessing to existing funds, some similar to what SMEs experience. The main issue is not only to know where the money is, but also how to deal with the administrative burden and costs involved – they can sometimes go beyond the benefits of funding. Simplification is key!

Regarding financial innovation and hybrid solutions, tri-lateral conversations of SEs, public authorities and the banking sector are necessary, first learning to understand each other's' language and needs, then move to creating new ways. Some examples already exist – ex. Italian crowd-funding platform managed by a bank (mentioned in a workshop).

One of the major points concerns support for SE during their whole lifecycle, to ensure a good start and sustainability. Start-up and prototyping needs were emphasised; some participants were looking for connections, asking for and offering help for start-ups in the Network Hub.

Conversations around local currencies can also be quoted in this thread.

6. EU-level coordination (within EU Institutions and across the EU)

A strong call was made throughout the Event for EU Institutions, and especially the European Commission, for more coordination and creating a one entry-point for SE. Currently there are 3 Commissioners and many services involved – could there be just one DG or at least one service? This would help foster sustainability of partnership.

Mainstreaming of innovation and SE-friendly solutions in EU-policies is needed, including an effort to ensure a coherent approach to SE in all Member States; of course taking into account the diversity of contexts and recent economic and historical experience of some Member States (see also the legal framework thread)

7. Visibility and recognition

Making SE more visible and recognise its contribution to society and economy can be achieved through many means – e.g. make a movie to tell about the existence and values of SE, sharing real stories. Awareness-raising among public authorities is a specific area of attention! This thread links closely to branding, impact and capacity building as well.



8. SE: impact and value added

Impact measurement and what indicators to use are a visible thread in many conversations and other topics of the Event, mainly around the question of how to go beyond GDP and concentrate on social impact measurement.

As for what SE bring, innovation was mentioned frequently; though some participants remark that more than innovation it's about anticipating the needs of society, as innovation cannot be promoted for its own sake.

Another important value added is that SE works inclusively throughout the whole business cycle. In creating solutions to societal needs, it implies participation, empowerment and integration of all members of society, allowing everyone to find their place and contribute. In profit distribution, benefiting the whole is more important than benefiting individuals or groups of people only.

9. Capacity building and education

Again, we have two entry points: what concerns SE themselves and what concerns formal education on SE.

Working and learning collectively is in the very nature of SE, so creating peer-to-peer coaching opportunities, networking platforms, sharing stories of SE, inspiring each other, learning from success and failure already exist and should be supported and reinforced. Ideas like collective knowledge hubs, trans-local connections were proposed. Cross-sector learning was also very present – charity organisations could share more with SE on how they work with the state for example.

Regarding formal education, starting from school curricula, through graduate studies, to PhD studies, there is a wide scope of possibilities to train the young generations, so that they know about and wish to work in SE. Glasgow University and University of Northampton came to share their examples in the Hub.

10. Research and social enterprises

This topic appeared not only during the dedicated EMES network workshop, but also in other conversations. Research can show the value added and impact of SE, at the same time creating innovative proposals on how to measure their impact and how to work with indicators beyond GDP for the whole of European/national/regional economies.

An interesting question arose in a workshop: "How to measure in a scientifically sound way sustainability and well-being?"



11. SE: inclusion of specific groups and values/innovation

A few specific groups were mentioned and coming back, again and again. Three examples can be quoted:

People with disabilities and special needs were very present, both physically in the Event and also through sharing on how SE can help them integrate, contribute and not be seen as a problem, but as valuable members of our communities. SE offers a comfort zone and a welcoming space to all.

Women can be drivers of SE and thus come at the core of systemic change. The Greek example offered in a video and discussions in workshops invite us to see women's empowerment through SE as key factor of new economy.

The "green" conversation has also been very present in Strasbourg – either via microfinance aspects or more widely, sharing stories of how green SEs have transformed local communities.