



# Peer-learning Partnerships: Social Solidarity Economy International Learning and Knowledge (SILK) Community Partnership



OECD  
Global Action  
Promoting  
Social & Solidarity  
Economy Ecosystems



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## What did this partnership address?

The consortium aimed to create a better understanding of internationalisation in the realm of the social and solidarity economy (SSE) and policies supporting it. An improvement in how internationalisation is understood and practiced by and for SSE organisations, as well as how it is supported, can lead to a significant acceleration in the development of the international ecosystem of SSE. Moreover, internationalisation can help scale the impact of the SSE organisations.

Analysis points to the increasing relevance and opportunities of internationalisation for SSE organisations. Despite the generalised belief that most SSE organisations are less adept to internationalisation, due to their tendency to offer highly localised products and services, there have been many examples of SSE organisations that managed to succeed in their internationalisation process. Moreover, the SSE has the right set of features to make internationalisation more sustainable and resilient.

The consortium looked at internationalisation as a set of processes involving multilateral flows of goods, services, financial resources and intangible assets (information, skills, business models, knowledge, etc.) within and between organisations and countries. Aiming to represent different perspectives, the consortium looked at public policies from two angles: i) public policies to support internationalisation, and ii) SSE organisations' internationalisation strategies. These perspectives included analysis of selected case studies, set of findings and policy options.

## What did we learn?

### Findings for policy makers:

- **Internationalisation is not a one-way street and is not limited to SSE going to foreign markets.** Indeed, SSE organisations can follow both an “outward” and an “inward” way of internationalising. The outward way is by expanding into foreign markets, while an inward way is about acquiring or being exposed to technologies, processes (or other intangible assets) from abroad, such as acquiring know-how from international sources. There is high potential for outward and inward internationalisation to be complementary, and

### About Peer-learning Partnerships

Peer learning is an innovative and powerful approach to gather practitioners' insights, create communities of practice, and stimulate collective thinking.

As part of the OECD Global Action “Promoting Social and Solidarity Economy Ecosystems”, funded by the European Union, six Peer-learning Partnerships have been set up to promote knowledge exchange and experience sharing on policies and practices for social and solidarity economy development.

policies can support that domestically and through stronger collaboration at international level.

- **Government support mechanisms vary and depend on the specific context.** There are few ways that governments can foster the internationalisation of SSE organisations. Such policies can be limited to a specific action, such as support with the presence in an international event, or an export-promotion programme with a dedicated focus on the SSE, as the example of KOICA (see box below). Support can also include a dedicated internationalisation strategy including specific programmes and institutional innovation, as for example the Scotland's support of internationalisation of social enterprises.
- **Enablers or external "collaborators" can support the internationalisation policy efforts around the SSE.** Governments should build on the existing international networks, funds, SSE organisations with technical expertise, etc. These enablers can support policy makers with the policy development around the internationalisation. A number of territories have already established collaboration with the relevant institution on issues, for example, related to trade enhancement (ACCIÓ, Spain), international cooperation (KOICA, Korea), and labour and social protection (see box on Rodando Juntas, Mexico). For example, ACCIÓ, the Catalan Agency for Business Competitiveness, allows the SSE to benefit from the work of a wide network of agents around the world, backed by a specific social economy department within the agency. This department also collaborates with the social economy service of the Regional government.
- **There are still gaps in the area of internationalisation policies.** Even if selected countries have put in place specific instruments to support SSE internationalisation, specific initiatives supporting internationalisation of SSE are few and there remain gaps in the area of internationalisation policies. An example of such a gap would be the absence of SSE from trade and/or association agreements. The inclusion of SSE could be a first step to make all trade policy increasingly inclusive and sustainable. Another such area would be additional support specifically focused on inward internationalisation, allowing SSE organisations to get access to know-how from other territories and learn more about new processes and technologies.

#### **Findings for practitioners:**

- **Internationalisation is a win-win process for SSE organisations and can make them improve their systems and operations both on local and international markets.** Even if not all SSE organisations go international, for many it becomes more and more an interesting option. Analysis conducted by the consortium on selected case studies shows that SSE organisations going international also improve the ways they operate in their home countries and have a potential to achieve even greater impact. Digitalisation and new intangible resources allow them to engage in international flows without loosening their deep roots in local communities. This is the case for organisations using inward flows, but also becomes more relevant in traditional industries. There is also a growing number of "born global" SSE organisations that were created to operate internationally (see example of CoopCycle below).
- **There is a need to develop specific management and leadership capabilities within SSE organisations.** Internationalisation requires a firm commitment to a "culture of learning".

The culture of operations, the managerial practices and legal frameworks might be very different from the initial country of operation. This can create the need of adjusting the business model, the systems, or rethinking the impact pursued. This will require the development of relevant tools and indicators, or the identification of relevant peers who could support finding such information. The internationalisation process also pushes organisations to acquire specific management and leadership capabilities, not only in strategic and technical aspects, but also in "soft" capabilities that involve developing more and better functional relationships in a context of greater complexity. Internationalisation can also raise the threat of mission drift or increase the complexity derived from the way in which they are governed. For example, cooperatives have more horizontal and multi-stakeholder governance models and internationalisation might demand to set up specific ways to ensure the governance structure in multi-national contexts.

- **Impact focus pushes the SSE to develop a new set of intangible assets, which can be an important denominator and the source of innovation.** There is a strong potential for innovation and impact in the combination of the three flows (goods/services, finance and intangible assets). Traditionally, intangible assets were the ones that are not physical in nature, such as goodwill, brand recognition, software, licences and intellectual property (patents, trademarks, copyrights, etc.). Analysis conducted by the consortium demonstrates that the SSE organisations are able to produce also other intangible assets, which will be in demand due to their sustainable and inclusive nature. These new intangible assets could be non-patented business models, impact-focused management strategies or social intervention methodologies, just to cite few. Intangible assets are more accessible to SSEOs compared to traditional businesses and could be a real asset for the SSE's internationalisation, especially for those organisations whose business strategy allows for unlimited flows of tangible assets.

#### **Case study: CoopCycle's internationalisation strategy, France**

CoopCycle was founded by former workers of a French private food delivery platform after its closure. Born in 2017, CoopCycle brings together a group of volunteers that help bikers to gather and organize. It is a federation of bike delivery cooperatives (coops). Governed democratically by its member coops, it enables bikers to stand united and to reduce their costs thanks to resource pooling started as a bike delivery platform. The CoopCycle's internationalisation strategy aims at sharing key assets in an "outward" flow of intangible assets (brand, software, management models, international support networks etc.) with the capacity to adapt to other socio-economic and cultural contexts. It can be considered a "born global" SSE organisation.

It is present in 12 European countries and is currently developing new nodes in Eastern Europe, North America (Canada, United States, and Mexico), Latin America (Argentina) and Australia. It is based on a model where 2% of its income is mutualised in exchange for a series of services, including, among other things: a software platform; a smartphone application; commercial prospecting; visibility and branding; consolidated purchasing; legal assistance and accounting services; and incubation of nascent local delivery cooperatives. Its internationalisation process is the natural extension of the reason why it was born in the first place: to fight precariousness, exploitation and informality within the new gig/platform economy.

Sources: (Diesis Network, 2022), <https://coopcycle.org/en/>

### **Case study: Rodando Juntas an example of an inward internationalisation policy, Mexico**

In Mexico, the experience of “Rodando Juntas” shows a very interesting example of collaboration at national and international level and the potential of policies supporting inward internationalisation. Indeed, this initiative of the Mexican government is led by INAES (the public agency supporting the Social Economy). It is based on a partnership between the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy as manager and investor (50%), the Inter-American Development Bank (50%), the Ministry of Labour and Employment Promotion of Mexico City, and CoopCycle, an international federation of bicycle delivery cooperatives. The objectives of the project are:

- 1) to promote sustainable urban deliveries by means of bicycles, whether electric or self-powered;
- 2) to improve the working conditions of delivery workers through the democratisation of technological tools to carry out their activities;
- 3) to strengthen couriers through the professionalisation of their services and members;
- 4) to cooperatives the services provided by couriers in order to promote decent work; and
- 5) to promote cooperative education within the organisations.

To meet objectives 1 and 2, Rodando Juntas applies two internationalisation strategies: an agreement for the dissemination and transfer of knowledge and best practices and an international licensing agreement that allows bike messenger collectives to make use of CoopCycle's digital platform. This cycle-logistics tool allows Mexican bike messaging collectives to deliver more efficiently and competitively. Since the software is protected by a reciprocity licence, which reserves its use to cooperatives, the bike messaging collectives must commit to form a cooperative and become legally constituted within a period of no more than two years.

Thus, this case shows the confluence and synergies of an "inward" approach of the Mexican SSE start-up and CoopCycle's "outward" internationalisation strategy where a policy supporting inward-led internationalisation process from a European-led federation of SSEOs has successfully been implemented benefiting both the federation and the Mexican social entrepreneurs.

Sources: (Diesis Network, 2022), <https://www.silk-project.info/stories>

### Case study: KOICA, Creative Technology Solution Programme, Korea

Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has launched a KOICA Creative Technology Solution (CTS) Programme in 2015. CTS provides multi-year support to partner countries to achieve economic and social development as well as welfare improvement goals. It applies innovative ideas and smart technologies from prospective entrepreneurs and start-ups in Korea to social problems in less developed countries. Since its launch, it has become a way for Korean social entrepreneurs to expand into developing countries, using their innovative social and economic solutions in those markets. It allows three levels of support adapted for start-ups, but also for more mature social enterprises.

From 2015 to 2020, a total of 76 projects has been approved around the world. CTS has helped social enterprises to grow through a series of support activities ranging from grants to consulting and networking with foreign market experts. One example is an international crowd farming project between South Korea and Asian countries. A Korean social enterprise named Treeplanet planned to boost incomes for coffee farmers in Nepal and Indonesia. Joining the CTS program, this company started a 'crowd-farming' campaign to encourage Korean consumers of coffee to have 'companion' coffee trees in one of the two countries. Buying a bag of coffee beans would guarantee a plantation of a new coffee tree in the designated coffee farm under the name of the customer. This practice helped farmers in Indonesia and Nepal plant more fairtrade coffee trees. A total of 17.5 tons of coffee beans were sold throughout the course of Treeplanet's participation in the CTS program.

The programme had an impact of over 830 000 end-users benefiting from it and brought in a total investment made to CTS partners from other investors exceeding USD 250 million. The programme's success has attracted more start-ups and social economy organisations into the program, and in turn, the visibility of the programme increased the number of social ventures going international.

Sources: (Diesis Network, 2022), [http://www.koica.go.kr/koica\\_en/3446/subview.do](http://www.koica.go.kr/koica_en/3446/subview.do)

## Peer-learning approach

The consortium has built peer-learning into the heart of all project activities and ensured concrete learning-based outputs:

- **Background research** aimed at producing the Scoping Paper and two Background Papers. The Scoping Paper helped to create a common understanding for the two peer review processes.
- **Multi-perspective approach focused on policy makers and practitioners.** From the very beginning all work aimed to cover two angles: i) public policies to support internationalisation, and ii) SSE organisations' internationalisation

### Outputs:

- Peer-learning outcome report: [Policy Brief including guidelines for policies supporting internationalisation of SSEOs](#)
- Background paper: [Internationalisation Policies for SSE](#)
- Background paper: [Internationalisation of SSE Organisations](#)
- [Suggested tools for the SSE internationalisation](#)

**Project webpage:** <https://www.silk-project.info/>

strategies. The two Background Papers produced covered each of these angles.

- **Analysis of eleven case studies** including six cases of SSE organisations going international and five cases studies looking at different types of policy instruments. Consortium members proposed the relevant cases. The shortlist was developed based on geographical balance and areas covered.
- **Six peer review webinars focused on policy makers and practitioners.** A lead stakeholder (practitioner or policy-maker) hosted each webinar and shared their learning experience, on which other stakeholders including experts, practitioners and policy-makers could comment. This approach allowed the project to gather practitioner-specific learnings related to case studies of internationalisation strategies and policy instruments.
- **Accelerated learning phase supported by the development of tools.** This phase allowed participants to reflect on all the information studied and facilitate the organisational intake. This included reflection on tools that could in the future facilitate the internationalisation processes (e.g. production of a consortium Policy brief for policy makers).

## Peer-learning consortium

Diesis Network has been leading a SILK consortium of 24 partners representing stakeholders from 14 countries including the EU, USA, Canada, Brazil, Mexico, India and Korea.

