Peer-learning Partnerships:
Respond, Rebuild, Reinvent (RRR)

OECD Global Action — Promoting Social & Solidarity Economy Ecosystems

This project is funded by the European Union

What did this partnership address?

The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered the most serious economic crisis since World War II. It has contributed to broadening the social divide and to increasing the complexity of social issues such as chronic unemployment or mental health, just to name a few. This partnership was designed to enhance knowledge and learning exchanges between city administrations and stakeholders in their local social and solidarity (SSE) ecosystem.

Subnational governments, including cities, are responsible for critical aspects of containment measures, health care, social services, economic development and public investment. They are at the frontline of the crisis management. SSE organisations have been a trusted partner, operating at the forefront of the crisis, addressing urgent sanitary and social needs.

> **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.

This partnership was focused on understanding how collaboration between city administrations and the SSE can be expanded and improved. Building on concrete examples, it also explored how local administrations can tap into the potential of its local ecosystem.

What did we learn?

Based on work with the nine selected cities, the consortium partners have come up with the following findings:

● **Increased transparency and proactive communication can create trust and lay the foundations for cross-sector collaborations.** During the COVID-19 pandemic, the state of emergency provided a fertile ground to revive collaborations built on the traditions of local solidarity, mutual support and to combine them with innovative approaches. An example is Torino City Love an initiative of solidarity and open innovation aimed at mobilizing Torino City Lab partners linking them with public and private organisations including the SSE to offer innovative solutions, free resources, actions and skills to support citizens and local businesses on topics such as health, information and digital services or work and school. These collaborations should be nourished and supported as they allowed to understand the social needs in the ground, and experiment with new and agile solutions

to address these social needs. The relevant opinion leaders in the SSE can act as "trust-brokers" and can help foster dialogue and cooperation.

- **City administrations can rely on the mechanisms and structures developed to help better cooperation with the SSE stakeholders.** These include work with networks and umbrella organisations, online or physical spaces. As an example, the San Francisco's Office of Civic Innovation (OCI) was created to enhance collaboration with civil society and the SSE to find responsive and inventive solutions to the challenges the city faces. One of the most important OCI programs enabling cross-sector collaboration in San Francisco is Civic Bridge. Civic Bridge is a public-private partnership programme that recruits private-sector volunteer teams to contribute approximately 20% of their time over a 16-week period and work alongside city staff to tackle critical civic challenges - including racial equity, economic recovery, and housing and homelessness. Since its establishment in 2015, they have been hugely successful, engaging with 27 distinct City departments on 68 projects, with approximately 600 City and volunteer participants. The estimated fair-market value of pro bono work contributed to the City is USD 7 million, delivered through nearly 47 000 volunteer hours. The programme was one of three cities worldwide to win the Bloomberg Engaged Cities Award in 2019.

- **The visibility and knowledge about SSE organisations and their activities increased during the pandemic.** Dedicated communication channels aimed at enhancing understanding of the SSE could be used. Communication approaches could include identification of the SSE ambassadors within the community, promotion of SSE success stories, awards and the achieved impacts. The identification of "champion projects" within the SSE and their support via visibility and funding, greatly enables their growth as change agents. For example, awardees from Dublin's Social Enterprise Awards 2021 include Clean Slate Property Services, a social enterprise that provides comprehensive property clearance, cleaning and maintenance services employing people who have obtained criminal convictions and are thus typically marginalised from the labour market.

- **Level of digitalisation has increased within the SSE during COVID-19, allowing many SSE organisations to continue their activities**. Supporting SSE actors to keep pace with digitalisation, particularly e-commerce is important to ensure viability of SSE. The city of Belo Horizonte in Brazil initiated an 80-hour course in digital entrepreneurship for merchants, retailers and entrepreneurs of the creative and solidarity economy. Initiatives like these are important in order to fight the digital divide, especially among the most marginalised (see example below).

- **Working together could also lead to transition from co-creation to co-management and co-delivery of solutions and programmes.** The co-designing processes has pushed cities to involve SSE organisations and civil society as partners and intermediaries in the implementation of the solutions. For example, the city of Torino explored a new approach to public-private partnerships through "cooperation agreements" with the community and the SSE actors, stimulating co-management solutions instead of traditional public procurement. Yet, this engagement should be further fine-tuned, with the design of right set of incentives, policies and capacity-building tools.

- **Improved coordination at city-level with national and regional authorities can help speed-up response and reduce overlapping.** Improved coordination around internal organisation and communication can make it easier to ensure that SSE policies and actions are not duplicated and not working in silos. Moreover, it allows to be more flexible

to test new approaches when innovative social responses are rapidly needed, especially at a time of crisis. This could be achieved by creating a dedicated coordinating committee, such as the Dublin City Social Enterprise Committee created in 2016 and comprised of SSE representatives such as the Irish Social Enterprise Network, the Dublin City University, or Inner City Enterprise to provide strategic collaboration and oversight to the SSE ecosystem. The Committee's responsibility includes identifying areas of need and opportunity for social enterprise development and supporting the scaling of social enterprises.

- **In order to foster the development of a vibrant SSE ecosystem and community, cities need to support SSE organisations in improving their economic viability, especially in the aftermath of COVID-19.** Cities can put in place variety of programmes aiming to support the SSE. This include promotion of access to market with social clauses in public procurement (Rotterdam, Warsaw), dedicated awards, and financial support programmes (Dublin, Warsaw), as well as enhancing links with impact investors (Rotterdam) among others. A good example is provided by the city of Bilbao establishing a "one-stop system" within the framework of the Bilbao Aurrera Plan focused on centralising support for the SSE and other small businesses with a range of urgent financial support measures and advice. These take the form of tax breaks, consumer vouchers, rental subsidies, specialised consultancy related to new digital areas, consumer and market trends, etc.

Case study: Public support with digital skills, Belo Horizonte, Brazil

Belo Horizonte is the sixth largest city in the country and is a capital city of the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil with 2,722,000 inhabitants. It was greatly affected by COVID-19, increasing inequality and making it more difficult for the marginalised groups get access to labour market. The city is internationally known for the excellent convergence of Brazilian and Minas Gerais cuisine, as well as for its musical diversity and has a strong focus on creative industries.

Facing the challenges of COVID-19, the city initiated a new capacity building programme focused on improving digital skills for merchants, retailers and entrepreneurs of the creative and solidarity economy. This course helped them adjust better to the changing environment and improve their access to markets, thereby curbing the negative effects of the pandemic.

The 80-hour training in digital entrepreneurship aimed to bring knowledge about the virtual and e-commerce world as tools to sell their products or services digitally and to facilitate reporting. The programme was initiated by the Municipal Secretariat for Economic Development, the Public Center for Solidarity Economy, and the Municipal Forum of the Solidarity Economy (composed of civil society organisations). Additionally, in partnership with the Brazilian Support Service for Small and Micro Enterprises, Belo Horizonte implemented a virtual marketplace to promote the products of the Social and Solidarity Economy.

The Subsecretariat of Strategic Affairs and Investments considered this programme fundamental to assist and insert entrepreneurs in the digital context and promote the creative economy, promoting gastronomy, crafts and fashion.

Sources: (UpSocial, 2022), (City of Belo Horizonte, 2021)

Case study - Rikx, Rotterdam, the Netherlands

Rikx is on-line platform developed in partnership with the city of Rotterdam. Supporting the SSE to address persistent social challenges at the local level, Rikx is a social outcomes marketplace, driving private investment into proven social projects. This platform links social entrepreneurs in the impact investors. It allows social entrepreneur to present a project and provides insight into the impact that social entrepreneurs make and converts it into a monetary value. How does it work? Applicants with projects apply to Rikx, their impact is evaluated and a monetised value is placed on their outcomes. Successful projects are listed on the platform and companies (with social responsibility objectives) as well as philanthropists and others act as buyers. Once the investment threshold is reached, a project commences, and its outcomes are evaluated at the end. Unlike other platforms, with Rikx, investors 'buy outcomes' rather than funding activities, resulting in increased investment in local projects that work.

At the same time, Rikx allows an investor to make meaningful investments in one of the participating social entrepreneurs, who then make a guaranteed impact in the places where it is needed most. This creates space for them to innovate, develop or grow. Linking this to the company's obligations in terms of social and environmental responsibility creates a win-win situation. To this end, Rikx uses an innovative 'social impact token' methodology, whereby investors can 'offset' social impact as it happens with carbon emissions in the case of environmental impact. In early 2022, Bloomberg Philanthropies named Rotterdam one of the winners of the Global Mayors Challenge, with a large award to scale Rikx internationally.

Sources: (UpSocial, 2022), https://rikxplatform.nl

Peer-learning approach

Peer learning was enhanced through the organisation of the knowledge exchange workshops in a virtual format. The workshop approach required preparatory background research, identification of good practices and case studies as well analysis of the findings following discussions and peer learning.

The whole process was organized in the following phases:

- Phase 1 - Development of the profile of each participating city (background work)

- Phase 2 – Identification of common and unique challenges (workshops)

- Phase 3 – Innovative solutions applied to improve their SSE ecosystem (workshops)

- Phase 4 – Summary of the findings in the outcome report (workshops)

Outputs:

- Peer-learning outcome report: "City administrations and social and solidarity economy ecosystems: reviewing interactions in times of COVID-19"

Project webpage: https://rrr-project.upsocial.org/

This approach allowed to collaboratively explore shared challenges around the SSE ecosystems in the cities, to expose synergies and good practices, to exchange learnings, and to examine and showcase relevant solutions. One of the objectives of this approach was also to create a sustained network which could collaborate after the end of the project.

Peer-learning consortium

[UpSocial](#) together with [Ashoka](#) lead the [Respond Rebuild Reinvent (RRR) consortium](#) co-ordinating partners from 11 countries to support local authorities in improving cross-sectoral collaboration with Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) ecosystems in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 16 partners include: