

**European Social Solidarity Economies in Dialogue – East-West and West-Est Learning Processes**  
**Panel 0: Concrete Utopia from international perspective**

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Concrete utopia is becoming true – it is really moving to be able to be communicating with you. Thank you Orsi for the question! After this pandemic we cannot go back. The concrete utopia is to meet the challenges in our regions.

The more we communicate with each other, the more we meet in regional fora, work together the more we are acting in responsibility with our region, trying to promote circular economy. The view across borders from our own region and country to other continents and cultures towards other Solidarity regions, which have gathered into a national movement, can complement and widen our inspiration and strengthen the concrete utopia, which we urgently need. – here are some examples from different levels – for us concrete utopia

**Latin America - „Another world is possible! “<sup>1</sup>**

Under other frame conditions regional fora of solidarity economy enterprises (SEE) gathered in the National Brazilian Forum of SE and became a political power in the country<sup>2</sup>.

Members of a SE working group of the World Social Forum had elected a candidate to become Secretary of State for SE in the Ministry of Work and Employment of Brazil under the government of the Workers Party (2003-2016). Paul Singer, saw his duty in representing the interests of the SE enterprises and their regional fora by formulating respective national policy programs with other ministries. That is how they built a representation of SSE interests on the national level.<sup>3</sup>

In the beginning the focus was laid on the construction of cooperatives of the poorest and most miserable, the waste-collectors, then the movement of houseless people organized, the movement of the landless farmers, Sem Terra, got stronger.

The more the small farmers cooperated the more importance they dedicated to ecologically sound careful treatment of the soil and water bodies

In the National Secretariat of SE, a team was preparing decent working contracts for everyone, was liberating workers out of slave-working relations, which then organized, to form cooperative enterprises with organized support.

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<sup>1</sup> Bénédicte Manier: Un million des révolutions tranquilles, travail, environnement, santé, argent, habitat... comment les citoyens changent le monde, Paris 2013.

<sup>2</sup> This had been prepared by a mapping process, that backed up the possibilities to relate to each other.

<sup>3</sup> Verein zur Förderung der Solidarischen Ökonomie: Solidarische Ökonomie in Brasilien und Europa, Entwicklungsperspektiven Nr. 83/84, Kassel 2004; Elmar Altvater, Nicola Sekler (Hrsg.): Solidarische Ökonomie, Ein Reader im Auftrag des Wissenschaftlichen Beirats von Attac Taschenbuch – VSA, 2006; Sven Giegold, Dagmar Embshoff (Hrsg.): Solidarische Ökonomie im globalisierten Kapitalismus: In Kooperation mit der 'Bewegungsakademie' und der 'tageszeitung' Taschenbuch – VSA 2008; Verein zur Förderung der Solidarischen Ökonomie (Hrsg.): Die ökonomische Dimension des Friedens: Soziale Solidarische Ökonomie Broschiert, kassel university press, Kassel 2017.

Community banks were founded by groups that were well organized including elaborated widespread networks of the SE movement, they formed best practice.<sup>4</sup>  
103 regional currencies were initiated successfully fomenting regional economies.

More than 100 **universities** created incubators of SSE<sup>5</sup>. They organized in two large networks and met regularly to evaluate their work and interchange worthwhile experiences. The best students acquired practical knowledge with incubators.

**The National Association of Workers in self-administered enterprises** (ANTEAG)<sup>6</sup> which trained employees of insolvent enterprises, to take responsibility for it in the form of cooperatives. Later, UNISOL carried out this practice.

**Church Organisation, Caritas**, financed SE training programs in the concept of the pedagogy of freedom.<sup>7</sup>

With the interest to free their town from worklessness and illegal business **mayors** created the **Network of Public Promoters of State Programs for SSE**. In their frequent meetings they quickly learnt about best practices. The quickly expanding network installed public centres in which SSE courses on different levels were held and where SSE products could be sold.

People met on **regional markets**, where ecological farmers from expropriated farms were selling their products, mutual information was exchanged, and **public panel discussions** were organized on common questions.

A common planning process of the SSE movement oriented by the SE regions was growing **Every three years actors of transformation prepared possible solutions to problems they faced in their regional forum and sent delegates to the national SE Congress. The National SSE Secretariat** put the results of the SE Congress in practice formulating national programs together with more than 20 ministries.

In large Conferences the SSE groups gathered and for the first-time delegates of indigenous organisations were represented. Important intercultural meetings occurred.

**„Another world already exists! “indigenous communities living in regional solidarity, insist on an integral vision on global ecological interrelationships (cosmology), social coherence and ethical values:**

**Sumak kawsay and suma qamaña** are Quechua and Aymara concepts for life in harmony with nature and reciprocity in the community, are often translated as „the good life” which is always linked with the **responsibility for the common territory** that means sound management of the earth and the rivers. This is related to beliefs and traded knowledge and concepts that have been trans passed over generations. The territory is always seen in the wholistic cosmic relationship and the spiritual leaders care for the observance of the limits, that facilitate life in material and spiritual equilibrium. Translated into our language we

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.uclg-cisdp.org/en/observatory/banco-palmas>

<sup>5</sup> In some there were theoretical debates linked to practical work of counselling incubation processes.

<sup>6</sup> Founded by conscious workers from trade unions. Later, this role was carried out by UNISOL  
<http://portal.unisolbrasil.org.br/>

<sup>7</sup> Paulo Freire: Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Penguin Modern Classics) Taschenbuch, London 2017  
Paulo Freire: Pädagogik der Unterdrückten, Hamburg 1998

understand it as **observance of planetary boundaries according to planetary ethics to observe human rights and rights of nature. There is no room for racism and colonialism. Moreover, Justice and Care for Nature are the focus and guarantee peace.**

Concrete utopia is also quite advanced **in the heart of capitalism**. Constitutive contradictions lead to this inherent dialectic. Workers in Chicago developed professional answers to insolvencies of their enterprises and organized workers buyouts as cooperatives. They include their municipalities in the process of counselling, training and cooperative management of their enterprises. Under the leadership of Dan Swinney, a polytechnical academy was built, which was also training students from the black and Latino communities into the highly advanced manufacturing processes. The „Inclusion & Industry in Policy and Program 4.0“ is functioning based on a partnership of producers, educators, local governments and community organizations. They look beyond the borders as well and have a close cooperation with the Spanish Cooperative Consortium Mondragon.

**In Europe we find strong supportive organizations for workers buyouts in Italy and France**, which have been accomplished by cooperative and trade union processes and laws. The Italian Marcora-Law from 1985 is a worldwide example in this respect.<sup>8</sup>

**Concrete Utopia are workers responses to non-standard employment** in several European countries as we can read in the CECOP Report “All for One”. These examples are vital for post Corona policies as those **freelancers and self-employed as well as platform workers** have managed to find cooperative solutions which not only establish decent living conditions but also promote mutual communication and cooperative communities.<sup>9</sup>

Concrete **SSE-regions have formed in Europe**. Small farmers got conscious and organized, for instance in the Mühl- and in the Waldviertel regions of Austria, started direct commercialization and built-up value chains. Migration out of the regions turned into migration into the regions. In this context we find European SEE regions also in France for instance in the textile cooperative Ardelaine in the Ardèche/ France, the Cooperative Consortium Mondragon in the Basque Country/Spain amongst others.<sup>10</sup>

Agricultural workers cooperatives in the ecologically very vulnerable Andalusia/Spain driven by hardship in the fight for survival occupied a farm that was without cultivation and was later assigned to them. They cultivated vegetables, processed and put them into cans and commercialized their products thus **creating a cooperative working perspective for all workers. The same agricultural workers organized the local town administration in a way so that all of them could build a house**. By organizing construction material through the town administration, they were able to supply it to all those, who applied for construction material asking for 15 EUR monthly in turn. All got a house. Marinaleda became concrete utopia.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.uni-kassel.de/ub/index.php?id=39129&h=9783737603942>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.cecop.coop/works/cecop-report-all-for-one-reponse-of-worker-owned-cooperatives-to-non-standard-employment>

<sup>10</sup> Clarita Müller-Plantenberg, Joachim Perels (Hrsg.): Kritik eines technokratischen Europas, Kassel 2008, Claudia Sanchez Bajo (Hrsg.): Solidarische Ökonomie als Motor regionaler Ökonomie: Ardelaine in der Ardèche, Frankreich, Kassel 2009

<sup>11</sup> <https://cafebabel.com/de/article/marinaleda-das-utopia-ohne-arbeitslosigkeit-5ae00914f723b35a145e487b/>

When visiting Italian social cooperatives, we got to know many young people who were carrying out voluntary internships. Thus, they were able to **learn about work in an inclusive context and perspective**. Several social cooperatives organised in form of a consortium of cooperatives; thus, they were able to negotiate more firmly with their town administrations. With same qualification they could reach priority in calls for bids as cooperatives when applying for municipal jobs.

In France the SSÖ Law of 2014 led to regional **SSE Chambers of Industry and Commerce** in order to support the construction of this mode of production.  
Let us take up the inspiration by the concrete utopia from the internationalist point of view.

**Protection of earth atmosphere, health and food sovereignty ask for decisions in the agrarian-, energy-, mobility- and raw materials turn, if we want to maintain planetary boundaries and follow up planetary ethics.**

Actors of Transformation got more feedback in the pandemic, their organizations may be taking active part in the plans and decisions of the Post-Corona-Funds in common responsibility for their regions.

The inclusion of those, who suffered the loss of their work may be supporting the community supported agriculture and Cooperatives that promote renewable energy etc. Universities, trade unions and churches can realize their responsibility for the wellbeing of the society. By supporting educational- and research work they can promote the incubation of solidarity economy.

Students could enter SSE internships all over Europe, can promote social communication, reciprocity and practical experiences which will support educational processes.

**Our concrete utopia: The list of possible actions is long – as you actors of transformation already responded in our poll last year:**

Exchange of workers in cooperatives and SSE – great experience for life – speaking for myself.

Strong communication – networking – building value chains– regional cooperation leads to Regional Fora = creation of direct communication and building up confidence

Events of SSE regions and their enterprises

Interchange of guest professorships – common preparation of courses or students and other target groups<sup>12</sup>

Rotative Funds – Augmenting the area ecologically managed in the eco-regions – as well as proclaiming and working for „0-emissions “

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<sup>12</sup> The Chilean professor Luis Razeto Migliaro, who has organized a website like a university and today I discovered that he had many lectures translated into English - He also stresses the necessity of theory practice reciprocity. <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Luis-Migliaro>