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# **Fostering collaboration: Social solidarity economy and sustainable development in action an analytical study**

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**Abstract**--Given the limits demonstrated by the capitalist economy (social inequalities, unemployment, etc.), the world is now moving towards a more human economy called social and solidarity. The latter, unlike traditional economics, puts people at the center of its concerns. Combined with another phenomenon that continues to grow, namely sustainable development which combines environmental, social and economic issues. The social solidarity economy and sustainable development share common goals and principles, and collaboration between the two can lead to more comprehensive and effective strategies for promoting economic, social and environmental well-being.

**Keywords**--Social and solidarity economy, Sustainable development.

## **1. Introduction**

Since the 1980s, numerous voices have emerged to increase awareness among the general public and policymakers about the constraints and detrimental effects of excessive economic development. The multitude of natural and ecological disasters, along with economic disparities, both between the North and the South and within the North itself, among the wealthiest and most impoverished social classes, have underscored the adverse impacts of unrestricted economic expansion, both environmentally and socially. Confronted with these concerning revelations, international institutions have endeavoured, since the early 1990s, to establish public policies grounded in sustainable development.

Nevertheless, despite an insightful critique that exposes the constraints and inconsistencies of sustainable development, the degrowth movement fails to

present tangible solutions for initiating a new era, apart from the vision of a utopian society. Concurrently with sustainable development, another concept regained prominence in the 1980s-1990s: the social and solidarity economy. Beyond being just a process, it denotes the advancement of an economic and social sector that advocates solidarity, equality, and cooperation, in contrast to the prevailing capitalist economic framework. Put simply, the social economy aims to reposition human beings at the heart of the economy.

This article aims to offer a practical overview of the interplay between the social economy and sustainable development—essentially, our inquiry is as follows: **how do sustainable development (SD) and the social and solidarity economy (SSE) intersect in practice?**

To tackle this problem, we propose the following hypotheses:

- SSE and SD share common principles
- SSE plays a role in advancing SD

To gain a deeper understanding of the different phenomena under study, we raise the following questions:

- What are the connections between social and solidarity economy and sustainable development?
- What are the constraints or limitations?

To address these inquiries, our article is organized as follows:

## **2. Social and Solidarity Economy,**

Often known as the third sector (Defourny J. P., 1999) encompasses economic activities involving the production of goods and services carried out by associations, cooperatives, mutual societies, and foundations (Birch. K& Whittam. G, 2008, pp. 437–450.). Differing from capitalist and public economies, the social and solidarity economy combines private modes of creation and management (autonomy and economic risks) with collective elements (associations of individuals), all oriented towards social goals (Jackson. T, 2009.).

The SSE (Ipietz, 2001) also encompasses activities aimed at exploring new models of economic functioning, such as fair trade, economic activity insertion, and solidarity finance.

The Social and Solidarity Economy encompasses economic and social activities coordinated within formal organizations or associations of individuals or legal entities dedicated to advancing collective and societal interests. These entities operate independently with autonomous, democratic, and participatory management structures, and membership is voluntary. Within the Social and Solidarity Economy framework (Bénédicte, 2010) , all institutions primarily focused on social objectives are included, introducing economically sustainable and inclusive models while producing goods and services that prioritize the human element and address social needs in accordance with the common good. These efforts are aligned with sustainable development and the fight against exclusion (Parodi, 2005, pp. 26-41).

Globally, Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) often plays a significant role (Demoustier, 2001) both economically and socially. In Europe, for example, SSE provides employment to more than 14.5 million people, accounting for around 6.5% of the active population of the EU-27. In certain nations like Belgium, France, and the Netherlands, SSE contributes to over 10% of the GDP (Defourny. J& Nyssens.M, 2008, pp. 202-228.). The collective experience from these international examples have demonstrated that SSE has helped some of these countries partially mitigate the adverse effects of the 2008 crisis. Several states have enshrined SSE recognition in their constitutions (Pasquotto. Mariani, 2011, pp. 613-622).

The notion of solidarity economy is a relatively recent concept compared to social economy, and its boundaries remain less defined, despite frequently being linked together under the term "social and solidarity economy." The concept of a solidarity economy is embraced by the "alter-globalization" movement, which has been convening around the World Social Forum since 2001. The pursuit of an alternative form of globalization is closely tied to the quest for a different economic model, sometimes envisioned within mainstream markets and at other times as a separate parallel economy. In the subsequent section, we will endeavour to delineate these two concepts:

## **2.1. Social Economy:**

Social economy, as defined by Bidet (Bidet, 2000), typically involves economic activities conducted by private individuals with a focus on collective interests.

### **2.1.1. Components of Social Economy :**

Social economy is characterized by three distinct legal forms, as outlined by (Borzaga C, 2009) (Kim. D& Lim. U, 2017, p. 1427):

#### **A. The cooperative:**

Is an association of individuals who come together voluntarily to address their social, economic, and cultural needs, as well as their aspirations, through a collectively owned and democratically controlled enterprise that they utilize as consumers, workers, or producers. It operates under a restriction on profit distribution, with profits being reinvested to further the cooperative's activities (Manoury, 2001, pp. 108-134). Cooperatives can be found in a wide range of sectors including production, savings and credit, consumption, distribution, housing, insurance, and more (Fici. A, 2009, pp. 77-101).

#### **B. The mutual insurance company:**

Is a group of individuals working towards a social and non-profit objective, aiming to offer members and their families protection from a range of social risks such as illness and fire. They are prevalent in countries with underdeveloped or inadequate national social security systems and can also help spread risks related to production, such as poor fishing or harvests

### **C. The association:**

It brings together various voluntary groups of individuals engaging in economic activities without a primary focus on profit. The legal structures associated with these groups can differ significantly from one country to another. Foundations are occasionally included alongside these three organizational types. Nevertheless, there is not a unanimous consensus on this, as some advocate for a clear differentiation between foundations established by traditional forms of the social economy and those initiated by major capitalist entities where the associative basis is less evident (Laville.J.L. & Nyssens. Marthe, 2013).

#### **2.1.2. Principles of social economy:**

Social economy is guided by a set of principles outlined by (Draperi, 2007):

- (1) Prioritizing service to members or the community over profit, highlighting a mission distinct from profit-seeking where profits are viewed as a means to achieve the mission rather than the primary motivation (Defourny J. , 2005).
- (2) Emphasizing the autonomy of management to distinguish social economy initiatives from those of public authorities.
- (3) Advocating for a democratic decision-making process, often employing a "one person, one vote" approach commonly seen in cooperatives and associations.
- (4) Placing importance on individuals and work in profit distribution over income, as proposed by (Defourny J. P., 1999). Any profit distribution to members is limited and does not prioritize maximum capital remuneration.

It is important to highlight that public authorities occasionally simplify the social economy to a singular aspect, often focusing on the integration of disadvantaged individuals through work from a utilitarian viewpoint. While the legal structures and regulatory principles unique to the social economy are commonly present in solidarity economy practices, the latter underscores dimensions beyond institutional structure and operational standards (Capri. J.A& Tomas, 1997, p. 247 à 279).

### **2.2 Solidarity economy:**

Solidarity economy can be defined as "the set of economic activities subject to the will of democratic action where social relationships take precedence over individual interest or material profit" (Eme, 2005) . The idea of solidarity, in contrast to the individualism on which capitalist logic is based, is at the core of the various interpretations of solidarity economy (Pasquotto. Mariani, 2011, pp. 613-622).

Rather than starting from defined legal statuses, the approach of solidarity economy emphasizes the citizen roots and the democratic role of economic initiatives. Solidarity economy initiatives emerge from a "co-construction" of supply and demand and aim to create "public spaces" for citizen participation. The concept of a solidarity economy is widely advocated by the "alter-globalization" movement, which has been gathering around the World Social Forum since 2001.

The pursuit of an "alternative globalization" is closely linked to that of an "alternative economy", which can be conceptualized either within mainstream markets or as a separate economic system (Dacheux. E& Goujon. D, 2011, pp. 205-215). Solidarity economy represents this distinct economic model aimed at serving the common good and social welfare rather than individual gain (Servet, 2007, pp. 255-273.). However, this collective interest is defined by a broader range of objectives compared to those traditionally associated with social economy, particularly those originating in the 19th century (Steiger. O., 2006,, pp. 183-208.).

These objectives are framed in terms of novel forms of solidarity (Oulld ahmed, 2010, p. 186) : solidarity towards future generations, leading to the integration of environmental considerations into the pursued goals; solidarity across different age groups and genders; solidarity among regions; solidarity between the global North and South; and solidarity within close communities and towards the most vulnerable.

### **2.2.1. Criteria for identifying the solidarity economy:**

When it comes to identifying the solidarity economy (Chopart, 2006), we rely on two main criteria:

#### **a- Economic logic:**

In the realm of economic reasoning, three key factors stand out for examination: the rationality of economic actors, the system for coordinating individual decisions, and the resources utilized. Concerning the rationality of actors, which refers to the motivations driving their actions, three distinct approaches can be discerned based on the type of actor:

- "Instrumental" rationality, which aims to maximize individual interests and is primarily seen in business actors;
- The pursuit of collective benefit linked to goods and services provided by the public sector;
- The pursuit of social benefit where social interests take on an intersubjective dimension rather than a collective one.

In terms of rationality, the solidarity economy is mainly defined by its emphasis on social utility, while still allowing for individual profit and collective benefit. When it comes to coordinating individual decisions, three different forms can be distinguished:

- Coordination through market prices, involving the natural interaction of supply and demand, leading to spontaneous and decentralized coordination;
- Centralized coordination, typically seen in the public sector through planned economies or representative democracies;
- Participatory coordination where decisions are collectively made by all actors, reflecting principles of direct democracy

The solidarity economy is primarily associated with the third form of coordination, especially in terms of internal activity management, reflecting a key principle of the social economy (Moulaert.F.& Ailenei.O, 2005, pp. 2037-2053). Nevertheless, it also integrates references to market prices and public standards to varying degrees depending on practices.

Additionally, regarding mobilized resources, three main types can be distinguished:

- Market resources: acquired through market exchanges (capital, labor, goods, and services);
- Public resources: provided by the State through subsidies, grants, and social policies;
- "Reciprocal" resources: obtained through personal commitment without financial compensation, such as volunteering or activism.

While the solidarity economy utilizes all three types of resources, it stands out for emphasizing reciprocity over the other two (Laville L. P., 2009).

#### **b. The concept of social change:**

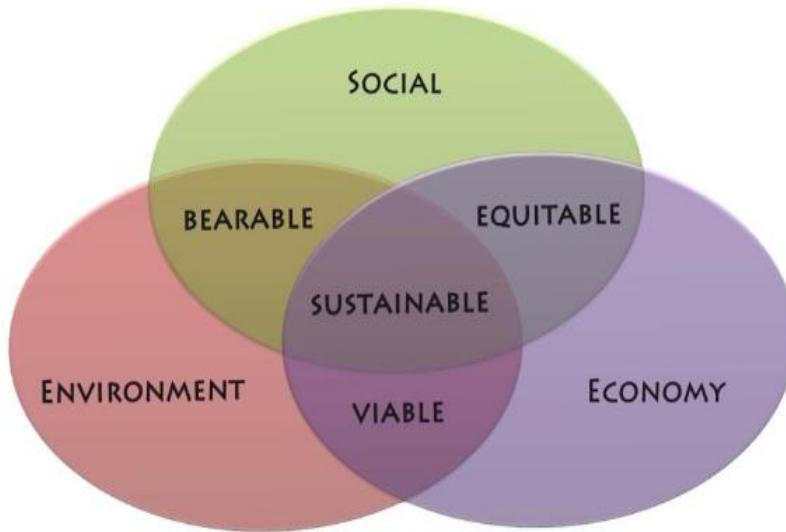
Capacity is central to the solidarity economy, which is seen as the epitome of the "alternative economy. (Kunreuthe. F, 2003, pp. 450-457.)" It is essential to define the specific alternative being pursued in contrast to the conventional economy. Various approaches can be distinguished based on the desired nature of change and the solidarity economy's ability to enact it. Three main trends can be identified:

- The palliative trend focuses on addressing the shortcomings of the public sector and the market, aiming to bridge gaps in meeting the needs of specific populations.
- The reformist trend involves the integration of the solidarity economy into the traditional economy by seeking to blend market principles with social and political criteria.
- The radical trend perceives the solidarity economy as a model for an alternative economic system distinct from the market economy.

The comparison of various social transformation models linked to the solidarity economy highlights the relationship between the solidarity economy and the development paradigm. This is how we address the correlation between the solidarity economy and sustainable development.

#### **3. Sustainable development:**

The sustainable development goes beyond environmental preservation; it encompasses economic, ecological, and social dimensions. These three pillars are visually represented as intersecting spheres in the diagram above.



**Fig N°1:** Components of sustainable development

**Source:** (Mancebo. F, 2010)

Sustainable development is realized when industrial progress aligns with the three principles of economic efficiency, social equity, and environmental responsibility, often symbolized as profits, people, and planet.

In the corporate context, sustainable development is commonly defined as achieving a harmonious triple bottom line, which involves effectively managing risks, obligations, and opportunities across financial, social, and environmental aspects.

Sustainable development, as discussed by (Brunel, 2011), presents a significant shift in our approach to communal living. It highlights the recognition of the unsustainable nature of our current development model and the serious risks it poses to future generations. This lack of sustainability is primarily linked to the depletion and deterioration of natural resources.

Moreover, the imperative to safeguard the natural environment prompts crucial reflections on our methods of production, consumption, spatial habitation, and societal living. These considerations fundamentally challenge our approaches to economic, political, and social development, urging us to reimagine our societal endeavours in a profoundly innovative manner, as suggested by (Arnaud, 2008).

### **3.1. Definition of sustainable development:**

The classic definition of sustainable development, as outlined in the Brundtland Report, states that it involves meeting the current needs without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This concept encompasses two key ideas: the prioritization of essential needs, especially those of the most disadvantaged, and an acknowledgment of the constraints imposed by our

technological advancements and social structures on the environment's capacity to fulfil both present and future requirements (Brundtland, 1987) .

The World Commission on Environment and Development's report underscores the importance of conserving the genetic diversity, species, and natural ecosystems on land and in water. This involves implementing measures to protect environmental quality, restore and preserve habitats crucial for species, and responsibly manage the utilization of exploited animal and plant populations (Asselineau. A.& Albert-Cromarias& A. Ditter J-G, 2014, pp. 59- 70).

### **3.2. Key Sustainable Development Challenges:**

In order for industrial progress to be sustainable, it must confront major challenges (Gabriel, 2007, pp. 6-7) at the macroeconomic level. These challenges are outlined in this table:

**Table 1:** Sustainable Development Challenges

Principles	Challenges
Economic efficiency	Innovation Prosperity Productivity
Social equity	Poverty Community Health and well-being Human rights Fair sharing of risks and resources)
Environmental responsibility	Climate change Land use planning Quantity and quality of water Biodiversity Responsible use of resources (renewable and non-renewable

**Source:** (Gabriel, 2007, p. 7)

### **3.3. Solidarity Economy and Sustainable Development:**

The Social and Solidarity Economy plays a central role in Sustainable Development initiatives. Actors within this sector embrace a distinct approach to work (Laville J. L., 2001, pp. 39-53.), aiming to operate within an economic framework where projects are designed to generate social and/or environmental benefits.

Today, sustainable development is viewed as a goal for a conscientious and people-centred economy, with the Social and Solidarity Economy occupying a significant position. Setting itself apart from purely profit-driven motives, this sector contributes to a development that is sustainable, economically feasible, environmentally conscious, and socially responsible (Wiedmann. T.Allen. C& Metternicht.Gj, 2018, pp. 421– 438).

The Social and Solidarity Economy plays a crucial role in advancing a local development model that prioritizes collective well-being by leveraging human and

social capital, natural resources, and financial resources (Chopart, 2006). This approach serves as a key driver towards achieving sustainable development goals, challenging the conventional focus on economic growth (Akhabbar, 2011, pp. 1-3).

The SSE and Sustainable Development align in their core principles:

- Placing individuals at the forefront, prioritizing societal well-being over profit and exploitation.
- Promoting democratic governance and citizen engagement in decision-making processes.
- Encouraging cooperation and solidarity for the common good.
- Fostering economic sustainability through environmentally friendly practices.
- Emphasizing local engagement and collaboration for the benefit of the community.

### **3.4. Sustainable Development and Solidarity Economy:**

Sustainable development provides an opportunity to reconsider our development paradigms by emphasizing a fresh interaction between humans and nature, as well as a renewed alignment among economic, political, and social aspects (Brodhag, 2006, pp. 136-145). The solidarity economy seamlessly integrates into the framework of sustainable development, striving to establish a novel link between economic activities and the objectives of fostering social cohesion and democratic engagement (Le Blanc. D, 2015, pp. 176-187.).

Nevertheless, sustainable development is frequently narrowed down to its environmental aspect, risking being viewed solely as a technical issue of managing natural resources, primarily associated with scientific exploration and alterations in daily resource usage habits (such as water, heating, transportation, etc.). Importantly, many of the environmental solutions currently under consideration have unintended adverse repercussions on economic, social, and political fronts.

The application of any technical solution represents a societal decision that must encompass economic, political, and social aspects. In this context, the solidarity economy is deeply intertwined with sustainable development. Sustainable development is grounded in the principle of solidarity, which encompasses support for future generations and all global populations, particularly the most disadvantaged. Thus, sustainable development and the solidarity economy can be united around this principle. However, solidarity should not be limited to aiding those in need or merely addressing deficiencies.

The solidarity fostered through sustainable development and the solidarity economy prioritizes collaboration over aid, nurturing potential rather than meeting immediate needs, and fostering creation over simple redistribution. It manifests through partnerships centred on a shared vision, focusing less on preserving past accomplishments and more on embracing new possibilities for a different and improved future. Both sustainable development and the solidarity economy share a common goal: to envision an "integral" approach to development

that encompasses all individuals, present and future, as well as the entirety of human capabilities, known and yet to be discovered.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The urgency of addressing environmental challenges underscores the importance of embracing a social approach to the economy, as advocated by the underlying principles of the social economy.

The social economy offers a promising avenue because within these enterprises, there should ideally be features that resonate with the core values of sustainable development. This includes aspects such as participatory decision-making, active citizen engagement, potential integration of environmental concerns, and equitable income distribution within the community. As a result, there exist potential synergies between the social economy and sustainable development. The success of a social economy enterprise in advancing sustainable development will be assessed based on both its internal management practices and its external engagement strategies.

The principles underlying social economy and sustainable development share common ground, such as:

1. acknowledging the human and social impacts of economic activities, necessitating the consideration of social externalities resulting from economic actions;
2. integrating economic and social factors into decision-making processes, moving away from prioritizing unfettered development, business growth, and profits;
3. emphasizing the well-being and dignity of individuals and communities, prompting a re-evaluation of development approaches.

Moreover, social economy and sustainable development align on various fronts, including:

- the significance of democratic decision-making;
- the importance of citizen participation;
- the need for income redistribution within communities;
- recognition of the social aspect;
- commitment to the public good;
- a development paradigm that emphasizes social goals.
- "The social aspect of the social economy plays a crucial role in shaping the social aspect of sustainable development

These results allow us to confirm the first hypothesis of our work. A sustainable development strategy must involve actors from the social economy to be fully effective. The actions of environmental groups and other social economy enterprises have greatly contributed to the implementation of new public policies and new environmental services, enabling the development of the recycling market and industry. They are also at the forefront of concerns regarding sustainable development.

However, the solidarity economy, starting from the observation that the prosperity of developed countries (often referred to as Northern countries) is based on the

intensive use of natural resources, leading to pollution and even the destruction of numerous ecosystems, it is feared that the desire for underdeveloped countries (often referred to as Southern countries) to progress towards a similar state of prosperity built on equivalent principles may lead to even greater degradation of the biosphere. As it is clearly not feasible to prevent the population of poor countries from reaching the level of comfort enjoyed by developed countries, the concept of sustainable development aims to define patterns that would limit the impact of development on the environment, their ecological footprint.

This observation prompts us to confirm the second hypothesis with some caveats. Sustainable development and the social economy are not entirely synonymous. Sustainable development emerges from the efforts of a wide array of actors and represents a transformative process. While the social aspect of the social economy plays a role in the social dimension of sustainable development, the latter also includes environmental and economic dimensions that may not fully coincide with the social economy. Conversely, the social economy incorporates unique dimensions that differ from those of sustainable development.

As a conclusion of this paper, we can propose these topics:

- impact of Social Solidarity Economy Initiatives on Local Communities:
- Policy Frameworks for Promoting Social Solidarity Economy:
- Gender and Social Solidarity Economy:
- Social Solidarity Economy and Climate Change Resilience:
- Social Solidarity Economy and Digital Innovation:
- Social Solidarity Economy and Global Supply Chains:
- Social Solidarity Economy and Post-Pandemic Recovery:

These topics offer a range of opportunities for future research to deepen our understanding of the social solidarity economy and its potential contributions to sustainable development, social justice, and community well-being.

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