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# The Social and Solidarity Economy transnational policy network: state of play and new perspectives

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## Abstract

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Starting from the observation that there is nowadays a growing interest in the Social and Solidarity Economy within governments and international organizations, this paper aims to understand the current dynamics around the SSE on the international scene. Based mainly on observative participation, this research compiles the overall picture of the SSE transnational public policy network in its current state. This paper, therefore, seeks to understand who the members of this network are, whether they are governmental or non-governmental actors, and how they are organized. Secondly, this paper aims to explain the growing hopes of global SSE networks to achieve international recognition of the SSE, whether through the coordination of global SSE networks or the initiation of processes for the adoption of new international legal frameworks.

**Keywords:** SSE transnational policy network, SSE networks, international legal framework

## Resumen

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### La red transnacional de políticas públicas de la ESS: estado de la situación y nuevas perspectivas

A partir de la observación de que hoy en día existe un creciente interés por la Economía Social y Solidaria (ESS) en los gobiernos y las organizaciones internacionales, este trabajo pretende comprender la dinámica actual en torno a la ESS en la escena internacional. Basado principalmente en una participación observacional, este trabajo de investigación pretende dibujar un retrato de la red transnacional de políticas públicas de la ESS en su estado actual. Por lo tanto, este documento trata de entender quiénes son los miembros de esta red, si son actores gubernamentales o no, y cómo están organizados. En segundo lugar, este documento pretende explicar las crecientes esperanzas de las redes internacionales de la ESS de lograr el reconocimiento internacional de la ESS, ya sea a través de su organización y coordinación o de la iniciación de procesos para adoptar nuevos marcos legales internacionales.

**Palabras clave:** Red transnacional de políticas públicas de la ESS, redes de la ESS, marco jurídico internacional



We are currently facing a new momentum for the international recognition of the Social and Solidarity Economy<sup>3</sup>. This is what a lot of global SSE actors and stakeholders would say, but why? The Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) is not something new. However, with a quick overview of the main actors and current international public policies initiatives, we can see that a growing number of institutional actors are getting interested in the SSE. In the face of the climate and health crisis, where many States around the world are looking for a more local, human, environmental, social, and solidarity-based economy, it seems the diverse structures of the SSE managed to be progressively identified and recognized as one of the solutions to the challenges and issues of global development. These current energy and efforts put into the SSE are the result of many years of mobilization by numerous individuals, from civil society and government institutions. Thus, besides understanding what are the new dynamics which are creating excitement in the SSE international networks, the objective of this paper is to establish a global panorama of the global SSE actors and stakeholders.

On the ground, the Social and Solidarity Economy includes a large diversity of actors, with cooperatives, mutual societies, associations, foundations, social enterprises, and others. A few terms are used by the actors to describe themselves such as “SSE global movement”, “SSE actors” or “SSE international networks”. Indeed, a lot of SSE entities are gathered in international networks either sectorial networks like the International Cooperative Alliance and the International Association for Mutual Societies or transversal networks like SSE International Forum or the RIPESS<sup>4</sup>. Also, as there are nowadays not only SSE actors who are involved in the promotion of the SSE at the international level, a few organizations talk about “SSE actors and their stakeholders” or “SSE ecosystem” like the case of GSEF<sup>5</sup>. In this paper, we will rather use the concept of “SSE transnational policy network”. This policy network is understood as defined by P. Le Galès: “In a complex environment, networks are the result of more or less stable, non-hierarchical cooperation between organizations that know and recognize each other, negotiate, exchange resources and may share norms and interests. These networks then play a determining role in setting the agenda, making decisions, and implementing public action.”(Le Galès, 1995, p.14)<sup>6</sup>. This concept is very helpful as it includes a lot of aspects of the multilateral characteristic of the relationships around public policies and enables an organized and dynamic reading (Josselin, 1995). In our case, it enables us to include the governmental institutions which are working closely with the global SSE networks. Using the term “transnational” refers to the reality of the global SSE networks that are on various continents but are all working for the same international public policies.

A policy network always refers to specific public policies. Here, we understand SSE transnational public policies in its large sense at the international level, which means any

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<sup>3</sup> To lighten the text, “Social and Solidarity Economy” and “SSE” will be used indistinctively as it is commonly done.

<sup>4</sup> RIPESS: Intercontinental Network for the promotion of social solidarity economy, presented below.

<sup>5</sup> Global Social Economy Forum, a global network of local governments and SSE organizations, presented below.

<sup>6</sup> Translated from French by the author.



international text, binding or not, which has been adopted by a certain number of States to recognize the SSE and encourage its development. To this day, there is no text at the international level that recognizes a global definition of the SSE. To obtain this type of recognition is at present the main goal of the SSE transnational policy network. Thus, while contributing to a better knowledge of the too little documented SSE transnational policy networks, this paper aims to understand how the Social and Solidarity transnational policy network is organized, and why it can be affirmed we are currently witnessing a new momentum for the international promotion and recognition of the SSE.

This paper was prepared in the framework of the International Coalition of the SSE, a gathering of five of the main SSE international networks<sup>7</sup>, which we will describe later in this paper. The author is a Ph.D. student in political science, and, as part of a CIFRE agreement<sup>8</sup>, is also a Mission Officer in the organization SSE International Forum. Part of her mission is to coordinate the Secretariat of the International Coalition of the SSE. Thanks to this position, this paper has been prepared from the heart of the current global dynamics for SSE at the international level. Thus, this paper, which aims to account for what is occurring so it can be understood by all, is firstly based on observative participation. This method consists in firstly getting immersed in action and secondly conducting research on what has been observed (Fraisie, 2020). Here the participative observation is based on the participation to all the internal and external activities of the International Coalition of the SSE and the main SSE international spaces of exchanges such as the UNTFSSSE<sup>9</sup> meetings or international SSE public events<sup>10</sup>. This paper also uses the empirical data and results of the Master thesis produced by the author in June 2021 (Pouzoulet, 2021b). This Master thesis was mainly based a qualitative analysis from twenty-one semi-directive interviews with fifteen workers from SSE structures, five international officials, and one former representative of the French government. Lastly, a lot of grey literature has been analysed to produce this paper, from the websites of the organizations to other existing documents and reports.

Based on these various sources, this paper is structured in two parts. We will first try to depict the overall picture of the SSE transnational policy network, including the global SSE networks and governmental organizations. Then, we will focus on the current dynamics around

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<sup>7</sup> The current and founding members are the *International Cooperative Alliance* (ICA), the *International Cooperative and Mutual Insurance Federation* (ICMIF), the *International Association of Mutual Benefit Societies* (AIM), *SSE International Forum*, and the *Global Social Economy Forum* (GSEF). They are all presented below.

<sup>8</sup> The thesis with a CIFRE agreement (Industrial Convention for Training through Research) is a type of French contract for the preparation of a Ph.D. It is a 3-year collaboration through research between a host structure (here SSE International Forum), a research unit that supervises the work of the Ph.D. student (here the Centre Emile Durkheim at Sciences Po Bordeaux), and a Ph.D. student who devotes his or her time to research (here the author).

<sup>9</sup> United Nation Inter-Agencies Task Force on the Social and Solidarity Economy, presented below.

<sup>10</sup> Mainly Pact for Impact events (April 2021, March 2022).



the SSE transnational policy network, again from global SSE networks and governmental institutions' points of view.

## 1. State of play of the SSE transnational policy network

At the international level, there are three types of policy networks (Josselin, 1995): the epistemic community (Haas, 1992), the normative or advocacy network (Sikkink, 1993), and the policy network in a strict sense (Cowhey, 1990; Kapstein, 1992). According to the information collected and the typologies criteria, it seems the SSE transnational policy network is situated at the intersection of various types. Thus, instead of explaining why the SSE transnational policy network is more similar to one type than another, we will here use an analytical framework to understand how it is organized. Inspired by the grid of R.A.W. Rhodes and D. Marsh (Rhodes & Marsh, 1995, p. 53) and P. Hassenteufel (Hassenteufel, 2021, p. 85), we will focus on the composition of the SSE transnational policy network, its integration, and power relationships. To complete an overall panorama of the SSE transnational policy network, we will deal with all the actors: (i) experts and research groups, (ii) non-governmental organizations, structured as global SSE networks, (iii) supranational institutional actors, at the regional or global level, and (iv) State-led initiatives of multilateralism.

### 1.1. The experts and research groups on the SSE

In the SSE transnational policy network, one can be labelled an “expert” if they have years of experience in the SSE or are academic researchers working on the SSE. In respect of the SSE, the boundary between field actors and academic researchers is not so clear. This ambiguity is powered by various practices: field actors publishing in academic reviews dedicated to the SSE<sup>11</sup>, academic researchers involved in SSE organizations<sup>12</sup>, or even practices of research-action for SSE with partnerships between SSE organizations and academics (Pouzoulet, 2021a).

Thus, in the case of the SSE, although it is difficult to talk about an SSE epistemic community in a strict sense (Haas, 1992), we can suppose a loose epistemic community sharing common concepts and certain normative beliefs which are often elaborated by inspiring and knowledgeable practitioners and academic researchers. Particularly, it exists

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<sup>11</sup> For example, the RECMA (*Revue Internationale de l'Economie Sociale*) is a review that traditionally publishes as many articles by researchers as by practitioners, defending the idea that practitioners have as much capacity to produce knowledge.

<sup>12</sup> There are a lot of people with PH.D. or university professors who are involved in the decision bodies. Some organizations even have their own scientific committee, such as SSE International Forum from 2013 to 2019.



some spaces where academic researchers on SSE can share their work with their peers: there are specific reviews for SSE but also research networks such as the EMES International Research Network and the CIRIEC International<sup>13</sup>.

The International Centre of Research and Information on the Public, Social and Cooperative Economy (CIRIEC), founded in 1947 by Edgar Milhaud, is probably the most known on the international scene. Nowadays, the International Scientific Commission “Social and Cooperative Economy” counts a hundred members. This network edits the scientific review *Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics*, but also regularly publishes collective books or research reports. The EMES International Research Network is quite similar. It includes eleven established university research centers and 300 individual researchers. It also organizes international research conferences and regularly publishes books and research papers from research projects.

Those two research groups are well integrated and recognized for their expertise in the SSE transnational policy network. The CIRIEC and the EMES International Research Network are part of the main arenas and spaces of exchanges from the SSE transnational policy network. They also have very good relationships, even some partnerships, with the main global SSE actors and stakeholders presented below.

## 1.2. The global SSE networks: diversity and similarities

There is a multitude of global SSE networks but we will here focus on the six ones we consider to have a large influence on the SSE transnational policy network: the *International Cooperative Alliance (ICA)*, the *International Cooperative and Mutual Insurance Federation (ICMIF)*, the *International Association of Mutual Benefit Societies (AIM)*, *SSE International Forum*<sup>14</sup>, the *Intercontinental Network for the promotion of social solidarity economy (RIPESS)*, and the *Global Social Economy Forum (GSEF)*.

The ICA, the ICMIF, and the AIM are sectorial networks. As said explicitly in their name, they aim to specifically gather cooperatives and mutuals. For example, the ICA brings together, represents, and assists 318 cooperatives from around the world (112 countries in total). Created in 1895, it is one of the oldest non-governmental organizations. Its actions consist mainly in doing advocacy with governments and international organizations to create a legislative environment conducive to the formation and development of cooperatives. Aligned with the foundations of the cooperative movement, this network has only recently formalized its positioning on the Social and Solidarity Economy (which has a much broader scope than

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<sup>13</sup> To a certain extent, the International Cooperative Alliance Committee on Cooperative Research (ICA CCR) which focuses more on cooperatives could also be included.

<sup>14</sup> This organization was created under the name “Les Rencontres du Mont-Blanc”. It has been renamed SSE International Forum in 2017.



cooperativism) by publishing a position paper entitled "Cooperatives, key players in the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE)" in August 2020.

Unlike those sectorial networks, SSE International Forum and the RIPESS, are global networks that encompass all types of SSE actors and stakeholders. At first sight, they are relatively similar as they are both international networks, with a wide international influence, seeking to enhance and promote the Social and Solidarity Economy by bringing together SSE organizations. However, their approach is quite different and can be explained given the historical links of these two networks with the solidarity economy (with an explicit systemic and transformative agenda) and the social economy (based on organizations for which ownership depends on individual persons and not shareholders) (Poirier, 2014). On one hand, the RIPESS was born through the international meetings of the solidarity economy in the late 1990s. Nowadays, RIPESS keeps emphasizing its strong network on the ground and its commitment to a societal transformation. On the other hand, SSE International Forum was created in 2005 following the Mont-Blanc Meetings, organized to convene the leaders from the social economy. These disagreements and differences in the approach of the Social and Solidarity Economy have contributed, among other things, to create a climate of tension between these two networks.

Finally, the GSEF, created in 2013, is the most recent network. Proposing to bring together actors that were not specifically included in the other networks (local governments), the GSEF has positioned itself as a complementary network. The GSEF is part of a broad vision of the Social and Solidarity Economy. It includes social enterprises, and more generally any group that puts the individual before capital.

In the end, although these organizations have different and specific mandates, they are structured in relatively similar ways. They are member-based networks (with between twenty to several hundred members). The headquarters of these networks are historically based in Europe (Brussels, Paris, Manchester). The GSEF, which was historically based in Seoul, is now based in Europe (Bordeaux) too following a change of presidency in January 2022. These networks also function thanks to the salaried work of small teams (from two to about fifteen employees) with few resources. They are all part of the SSE transnational policy network, nevertheless, there was traditionally no place, as officially defined, where they could organize together and coordinate their advocacy activities. From our observations, we however noticed that these organizations maintain, more or less regularly, bilateral relationships. As an example, the most institutionalized links are between the GSEF and SSE International Forum, and between the GSEF and the RIPESS where they sit in each other's Boards. These relationships between networks can also be very informal with exchanges by phone or text messages. In all cases, those organizations from the SSE transnational policy network are shaping their activities according to the ones of the institutional actors.



### 1.3. From individual to organizational involvement of supranational institutions

Over the years, few international institutions have positioned themselves, some more than others, in the SSE transnational policy network. Thus, this section aims to understand what the dynamics are from the institutional actors' point of view, at the regional level with the example of Europe first, then at the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and finally in the United Nations agencies.

At the regional level, there are few international organizations that are contributing, at their scale, to the SSE transnational policy network. In this paper, we will mainly focus on the European level to illustrate the regional level as it is the most institutionalized and the one with which the global SSE networks have the most relations. Indeed, inside the European Union, a few institutions are involved in the SSE in various ways. The European Commission has been involved, with periods with more or less strong involvement, in the policy network of SSE since the 1980s (Hiez, 2021). In the last decade, the European Commission has demonstrated a certain commitment to recognizing SSE with various initiatives such as creating the Expert group on social economy and social enterprises (GECES). This group is a central space of exchange for all members of the SSE European policy network. The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and the European Parliament also demonstrate commitments to the SSE. For example, some European representatives created the Social Economy Intergroup in 1990. This intergroup aims to include the SSE into the work of the European Parliament, but also to ensure dialogue between all European institutions, States, and the SSE networks. Social Economy Europe, one of the main SSE networks at the European level, fills the role of Secretariat for this Intergroup.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which is an international organization providing policy recommendations, can also be considered as part of the SSE transnational policy network. As part of the LEED Program on Local Employment and Economic Development, the OECD dedicates a whole area of work to the SSE. Since 1996, the OECD published a list of in-depth reports and working papers on improving social inclusion at the local level through the social economy, but not only. In 2020, the OECD also launched a Global Action "Promoting Social and Solidarity Economy Ecosystems" in thirty countries. With the objective to write international guides on the legal framework and social impact measurement for the SSE, this Global Action also engaged some peer-learning partnerships (PLPs) dynamics, involving the global SSE networks and other stakeholders. If the OECD appears a very specific political space, we observed that its officers in charge of the SSE are very well included in the SSE transnational policy network. One concrete example is that SSE networks are regularly invited to OECD events on SSE, and in reverse, the OECD officers are invited to participate in any international event related to SSE.

At the UN level, the first agency to recognize the Social and Solidarity Economy is the International Labour Organization (ILO). This commitment can be illustrated, among many other activities, by the creation in 2010 of a one-week "SSE Academy". Organized each year





in a different city, this Academy was offered to all actors from the SSE transnational policy network. The ILO is also the first UN agency to use the concept of SSE in its official documents, like in the report on “Decent Work and the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE)” published in April 2022. The UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) is also very involved, with research projects dedicated to SSE. For example, during the period from 2018 to 2020 UNRISD led three projects: SSE Knowledge Hub for the SDGs, Promoting SSE through Public Policies: Guidelines for Local Governments, and Opportunities and Challenges of Statistics on Social and Solidarity Economy. These are only a few examples that could be duplicated in others UN agencies.

Moreover, the ILO, the UNRISD, and other UN agencies, created in 2013 a UN Inter-Agencies Task Force on SSE (UNTFSSSE). This Taskforce involves nowadays seventeen agencies<sup>15</sup> and the OECD. There are also fourteen observers which are international or regional SSE networks. For example, the GSEF, SSE International Forum, the RIPESS, and the ICA, mentioned above, are observers of this UNTFSSSE. Created to raise SSE visibility within the UN system and above, this Taskforce plays a very central role within the SSE transnational policy network. By organizing regular meetings where members and observers can present their work, and give and receive advice, the UNTFSSSE contributed to establishing a kind of institutional framework, with a certain level of continuity and regularity of the exchanges between some members of the SSE transnational policy network.

The role of the UN agencies in the structuration of the SSE transnational policy network should however be put in perspective. First, research and observations enable us to understand that the involvement of UN agencies depends a lot on the investment of UN officials. For example, inside the UNTFSSSE, we can observe some back and forth from some UN agencies' involvement which can be explained by changes in individuals working for the agency. Secondly, despite all the willingness and involvement of UN officials, there is still no global UN recognition of the Social and Solidarity Economy. The adoption of a UN Resolution on SSE, which is one project and advocacy priority for the SSE transnational policy network, could fill this gap<sup>16</sup>. This kind of project requires the involvement of States inside of the SSE transnational policy network, which is why it is necessary to understand what role and position States have in this policy network.

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<sup>15</sup> List of the member agencies: International Labour Organization (ILO), Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), The World Bank, UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), UN Development Programme (UNDP), UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), UN Environment Programme (UNEP), UN Human Settlement Programme (UN HABITAT), UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), UN Office at Geneva (UNOG), UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), World Food Programme (WFP), World Health Organization (WHO).

<sup>16</sup> A more precise analyze of all the political stakes and work around this SSE UN resolution would be very relevant for another research paper.



#### 1.4. The difficult position of the State-led initiatives of multilateralism

Outside of the international institutions, some States decide to launch multilateral initiatives to gather States with an interest in SSE, and sometimes more broadly all members of the SSE transnational policy network. For example, at the European level, Spain, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Slovakia, and Slovenia signed in 2015 the Declaration of Luxembourg to promote SSE in European institutions.

France can be a good study case to understand the State strategy regarding those kinds of initiatives of multilateralism in SSE. Although France does not have particularly remarkable national SSE legislation, it is often considered a leading country in SSE on the international scene. Indeed, France is behind several multilateral initiatives at the international level and with a more or less widespread scope. In 2013, France initiated an International Leading Group on Social and Solidarity Economy (ILGSSE). In the United Nations system, the International Leading Group is an informal forum, with a relatively recent and uncommon format, whose main objective is to create a privileged space for the exchange of experiences and good practices. It brings together States as well as international organizations and non-governmental organizations dedicated to a specific theme (Delmon, 2014). In the case of the ILGSSE, the Group gathered nine member States (France, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Luxembourg, Marruecos, South Korea, Uruguay, and Greece), two observatory States (Québec and Senegal), the OECD, and seven global SSE networks. The main activities of the ILGSSE were organizing side events dedicated to the SSE during the UN General Assembly. It seems however that the dynamics have gradually lost their impetus, with the States becoming less and less present. On the other hand, SSE actors attached great importance to this space and tried to make it more active. So much so that at a certain point, some governance problems between the French government and SSE International Forum (which had been co-secretariat of the group and propelled it since its creation) tarnished the Group's image and reputation.

In 2019, after a change in government, France decided to re-launch a multilateralism initiative called “Pact for Impact” to gather all members of the SSE transnational policy network and. This initiative was first organized as a Summit which was held in July 2019. For a lot of reasons, one being it was the first time that such a diversity of actors (governments, UN officials, and global SSE actors) were present at the same event, this summit has been qualified as unprecedented. As we saw in the previous sections, although the members of the SSE transnational policy network are used to working together on some specific projects or arenas, there was no such place to bring them all together. Then, the idea was to channel this momentum into the creation of a Global Alliance Pact for Impact. However, after another change in the French government, the dynamic was also running out of steam. For some political reasons, mainly the use of the term “inclusive economy” and the invitation of some main actors representing private enterprises with more social orientation, some major global SSE networks also expressed reservations about the Global Alliance Pact for Impact.



In the end, France seems to be one of the few countries that positioned itself in the SSE transnational policy network. Doubts remain about why France. Some assumptions could be formulated: maybe it is linked to the strong personal and institutional links between some global SSE networks and members of the French government (one such as SSE International Forum and the French in 2013 when the ILGSSE was created), maybe the French government relied on its reputation in the SSE arenas to advance its Pact for Impact initiative, and maybe France is the only country with a strong interest in SSE which have the resources to establish such initiatives. What is sure is that the commitment of the States to such multilateral initiatives is highly related to the (national) political context. Can this explain why those State-led initiatives don't obtain all the success expected from the global SSE networks and other stakeholders? This is a question that requires more research.

To conclude, in this first section, we tried to understand the composition of the SSE transnational policy networks and the dynamics between all the actors. All the collected information provides a complete portrait of the SSE transnational policy network, based on the criteria of R.A.W. Rhodes and D. Marsh (Rhodes & Marsh, 1995, p. 53) and P. Hassenteufel (Hassenteufel, 2021, p. 85). Thus, the SSE transnational policy network is composed of diverse people and organizations, including experts and research groups, global SSE networks, international organizations and officials, and governments involved in multilateral State-led initiatives. This policy network is not so institutionalized, meaning there is no common adopted norms or decision-making procedures. Although there are spaces dedicated to regular exchanges between the members of the policy network, the continuity of the interactions is quite limited. However, all the SSE transnational policy network share a common vision and orientation for international public policies: the objective is to get better legal recognition of the Social and Solidarity Economy. The power relationships between the members of the policy network are quite difficult to determine with a simple state of play. Evidently, there are some strong political dynamics and stakes, but it requires going further in the analysis of this policy network. One perspective, which will be studied in the thesis of the author, is the use of the political work concept (Smith, 2019) to study the construction of public problems and their inclusion in the agenda by an analysis of the work and the relations between the members of the SSE transnational policy network. For the moment, in the next section, we will look at the current rapports within the SSE transnational policy networks and see what new perspectives they are opening for the future of this policy network.

## **2. The “new momentum” among the SSE transnational policy network**

As expressed in the introduction, there are many members of the SSE transnational policy network who are affirming that we are nowadays in a “new momentum” for the international recognition and promotion of the SSE. This part will focus on a certain number of



new dynamics around the SSE transnational policy network. The objective of this section is to understand why actors are talking about a new momentum, what are the expected outcomes of this momentum, and what it tells us about the SSE transnational policy network. To answer those questions, we will deal firstly with the new synergies between the global SSE networks, and secondly with the increasing opportunities for international legal recognition of the SSE.

## 2.1. New synergies between the global SSE networks and other stakeholders

In the first section of this paper, we saw that although there are spaces for exchanges between the members of the SSE transnational policy networks, the relationships between the main global SSE actors are infrequent, and not institutionalized. Nevertheless, in the last years and months, we can observe a growing number of dynamics of collaboration and cooperation between the global SSE networks and other stakeholders.

The first main case is the creation of the International Coalition of the Social and Solidarity Economy (ICSSE). In September 2021, five of the main global SSE networks, that we presented above (the GSEF, SSE International Forum, the ICA, the ICMIF, and the AIM), decided to “[join] forces in order to deploy a common voice and actions to make [their] achievements and resources visible and recognized”<sup>17</sup>. According to the Charter of this Coalition, by establishing rules for their cooperation, these global SSE networks aim to strengthen and raise the profile of a community of SSE actors and deepen advocacy efforts for the recognition of SSE. It is the first time that an initiative of this nature, with only global SSE networks, occurs. Some members of the SSE transnational policy network expressed some reservations, arguing that there could be a risk of dispersion of the forces with a multiplication of initiatives. However, the creation of this Coalition appears to be an obvious choice to its founding members. They are expressing the need of having a space of cooperation dedicated to global SSE networks only, so they can try to adopt a common position in arenas shared with other members of the SSE transnational policy network. The expression of this need is even more important given the current context of new momentum and the opportunities for international recognition of the SSE.

Some observers of the UNTFSSSE also want to create a Major Groups and Other Stakeholders (MGoS) dedicated to the SSE actors and stakeholders at the High Level Political Forum (HLPF). The HLPF is the main United Nations platform on sustainable development and has a central role in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the global level. Various publications, done by SSE experts mainly from global SSE networks or international organizations (RIPSS, 2022; Utting, 2018), prove the central role of the SSE actors in implementing the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. The creation of this SSE MGoS could be a

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<sup>17</sup> Extract from the Charter of the International Coalition of the SSE.



huge step in the international recognition of the SSE organizations, even more given the institutional consequences the creation of such a group could have. The creation of this group is still a project which has to be concretized, however, it illustrates the dynamics and crazes of the global SSE networks of the SSE transnational policy network. It also sounds like the Social and Solidarity Economy is now taking a step further, by getting a place in global debates, where SSE was not traditionally present, as we will see in the next point.

## 2.2. Increasing opportunities for international legal recognition of the SSE

The new synergies between the global SSE networks and other stakeholders are closely tied to the current momentum of international legal recognition that the SSE is facing. There already were some acknowledgments of the SSE from the United Nations Declarations in some specific cases, such as the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization (2008)<sup>18</sup>, the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) during the Board of Trade and Development in 2014<sup>19</sup> or the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in 2016<sup>20</sup>. These cases, very appreciated and praised by the SSE networks, are however very rare. There are also some rare international instruments that refer to the SSE. For example, the ILO Recommendation n°193 on the promotion of cooperatives (2002), the UN Resolution 71/221 of 21 December 2016 on “Entrepreneurship for Sustainable Development”, and the UN Resolution 71/256 of 23 December 2016 on “New Urban Agenda” all contain a reference to the SSE. Nevertheless, since 2019, we observe an exponential increase in international declarations or instruments that refer to the SSE. We can quote the UN Resolution 74/119 on “Cooperatives in Social Development” (2019), or the Abidjan Declaration (2019) and the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work (2019) which all called for supporting the SSE. It seems the Covid-19 pandemic somehow slowed down the dynamic which seems to raise back up again.

At the regional level, Europe illustrates this new momentum. In 2019, the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the opinion INT 871 (*Towards an appropriate European legal framework for social economy enterprises*) which suggested introducing into the European Union law a legal framework suited to better recognition of the Social and Solidarity Economy. After that, the European Commission started a process of consultation for elaborating a Social Economy Action Plan (for the period 2021-2030) which has been adopted

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<sup>18</sup> In the June 2008 ILO Declaration of Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, adopted during the 97<sup>th</sup> International Labour Conference, the ILO recognizes a strong social economy as critical to sustainable economic development and employment opportunities.

<sup>19</sup> United Nations, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Trade and Development Board, 61st session, Geneva, 15-26 September 2014.

<sup>20</sup> At the 2016 United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), the SSE was acknowledged to be a core component of the New Urban Agenda Implementation Plan for an Urban Paradigm Shift. The final report of the Conference explicitly refers to the SSE in its Paragraph 58.



and published in December 2021. All members of the SSE transnational policy network contributed to the process of preparation of this Action Plan by providing recommendations. They all acknowledge the adoption of it while wishing that the Action Plan will be well implemented. Indeed, there already was a regional legal framework adopted in Africa. The Organization for the Harmonization of Business Law in Africa (OHADA) adopted a uniform act on cooperative societies in 2011 but it did not work as expected.

At this moment, various projects of adoption of international instruments dedicated to the SSE are the focus of the SSE transnational policy network: the OECD is in the process of adopting a Recommendation, the ILO will adopt a conclusion on SSE after the 2022 International Labor Conference (ILC), and there is also a project of adoption of a UN Resolution. In March 2022, the OECD announced that they started a process for the adoption of a Council Recommendation on SSE. Although this process is strictly confidential to the member-States, the OECD officials in charge of SSE, stroked up a consultation process with the main actors of the SSE transnational policy network to get their advice and feedback on it. The final text should be adopted in the second trimester of 2022.

The International Labor Organization (ILO), which has traditionally led several actions to promote the SSE, has put an agenda item on the “Social and Solidarity Economy for a human-centered future of work” for the 110th International Labor Conference (ILC) which will be held from the 27th of May to the 11th of June 2022. This Conference is highly expected from all the SSE transnational policy network for many reasons. It is the first time that the SSE has been added to the agenda of the ILC, but especially because one of the main expected outcomes of this debate is the proposition of a universal definition of “Social and Solidarity Economy” (including its associated principles and values), which has never been done before. Although the conclusion which will be adopted by the Governing Body of the ILO in November 2022 will be non-binding, it will still be a huge step for the international recognition of the SSE as this conclusion could provide national policy guidelines for a conducive environment for the SSE and guidance to the ILO Office on how to engage in promoting and advancing the SSE.

One of the current “ultimate goals” for the SSE transnational network is the adoption of a UN General Assembly Resolution for the SSE. In being harmonized with the ILC conclusion, the UN resolution would enable the adoption of an official definition of the UN system on the “Social and Solidarity Economy”. The main outcome would be to offer a framework for all the diverse SSE initiatives in the UN agencies and multilateral State-led initiatives. It would also enable the adoption of global UN instruments for SSE with specific funding available, rather than the current dispersed and low level of intervention within the UN agencies for the SSE. This project is not a new expectation from the SSE transnational policy network. There are UN officials and global SSE networks, from the UNTFSSSE, who have been working on this objective for years. The main difficulty which always postponed the project is that a UN resolution needs to be submitted by a member-State. To explain the difficulty of finding a State with a favorable political conjuncture for the SSE and resources to lead a UN resolution, SSE actors often point to the fact that one of the two elements is usually lacking: for instance



countries such as Cape Verde have a strong interest in the SSE but may lack resources needed to put forward a resolution at the UN level, whereas countries such as France have the resources but may not have a UN resolution for the SSE as a priority within its representations within the UN. For these reasons, this project has been for a long time in suspension. However, without having a lot of new concrete commitment, the current craze and interest from States in the SSE gives good hope to the SSE transnational policy network.

Simply put, we are currently observing a new momentum, new perspectives for the international recognition of the Social and Solidarity Economy at the global level. Although the legal instruments are not yet adopted and will be non-binding, we still note that the SSE is getting a seat at the table of higher levels of debate. A few years ago, the Social and Solidarity Economy was only quoted in some UN Declaration, in the next months or years, it will probably have its own UN Resolution, asserting its role in achieving the SDGs. In the same way, a few years ago there were only a few ministers for the SSE with a marginal place in governments around the world, today SSE is spreading, with ministries of Economy, Labor, or even Foreign Affairs, who are getting involved in international negotiations for the SSE. For the SSE transnational policy network, this is not a surprise but only the result of the daily work of advocacy they have carried out for years. Thus, a question that remains here is why now? It would also be interesting to deepen this point, see from the SSE transnational policy network, either from the global SSE networks or the governmental organizations, what can explain the good political conjuncture we seem to observe. At this stage, drawing hypotheses is not an easy task given that the momentum is currently unfolding. However, if we must identify the main elements that might be relevant to explore, we could quote the role of the Covid-19 pandemic, the way SSE has been added to the agenda for the implementation of the SDGs, and the influence of the various governments in policies and initiatives related to the SSE.

## First conclusions

The SSE transnational policy network is composed of diverse people and organizations (including experts and research groups, global SSE networks, international organizations and officials, and governments involved in multilateral State-led initiatives) which are all committed to the promotion of the SSE. Despite the lack of historical structure and continuity of the interactions between the members, it seems that the SSE transnational policy network is getting more and more organized and has been showing strong influence over the years. With a growing cohesion and cooperation between members to obtain their common goal of international recognition of the SSE, the SSE transnational policy network can be only at the beginning of a new step in influencing public policies. We can also state that we are nowadays facing a new momentum for the international recognition and promotion of the SSE with the diversity of governmental initiatives engaged to adopt some international instruments as it has never been done before. There is for sure a current enthusiasm and interest in the SSE which,



we assume, could be partially explained by a snowball effect involving factors such as the current crises the world is facing (political, economic, environmental, health, etc.) and a shift in the relation to the economy, its role and meaning. Thus, this paper enabled us to put together the profile of the SSE transnational policy network, with the path to the current state of play, but also with the main directions to understand the current stakes. This paper also opens a list of questions and hypotheses for future research work, mainly on the influence and power dynamics between all the members of the SSE transnational policy network.

As these lines are being written, several high-level meetings are being held between the members of the SSE transnational policy network (mainly for the International Labour Conference, the OECD Recommendation, and the UN General Assembly resolution). New events will probably occur in the next months and point out new steps for the SSE transnational policy network. This confirms the current relevance of this subject. The occurrences in the coming months and years will help us confirm (or redefine) our last assumptions regarding the trajectory of the SSE transnational policy network.

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