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Supporting Organizations and Intermediaries for Social and Solidarity Economy

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Abstract

This entry explains the supporting organizations and intermediaries for SSE. These organizations and intermediaries undertake a variety of supporting activities directly affecting SSE, such as design and implementation of legislation on SSE, development plans and strategy, and public policies for SSE, as well as other services not directly linked to government action. It describes key features of supporting organizations and intermediaries and introduces their diverse forms, including SSE umbrella networks and organizations at global, national and sub-national levels. The entry suggests ways to promote effective supporting organizations and intermediaries for SSE.

Keywords

supporting organizations; intermediaries; SSE ecosystems; participation; policy co-construction; capacity-building.

Introduction

Supporting organizations and intermediaries are essential components to the growth and sustainability of well-functioning SSE ecosystems at different territorial levels. They range from public sector agencies to private or non-governmental organizations (including SSE associations and networks, universities, and research and training centres), with a variety of hybrid institutional set-ups in between, such as formal and informal consultative bodies, sub-contractual agreements and public-private partnerships. These organizations undertake multiple supporting activities for SSE organizations and enterprises (SSEOs), which can include design and implementation of SSE legislation, SSE development plans, policies and programmes; and a range of support services, varying from advocacy and promotion of SSE interests in public policy arenas to capacity building and access to finance and markets.

A defining feature of supporting organizations and intermediaries is a strong relationship with the SSE community within the territory. Whether primarily governmental or non-governmental, these entities should enjoy a sufficient degree of trust within the SSE community and be able to ensure that diverse interests and needs, especially for under-represented sectors, are fully factored into policy and programme design and implementation. In addition, a broad coalition of SSEOs and social movements is essential for the success of SSE in establishing better collaborative relations with the government, developing innovative SSE initiatives, and creating and occupying policy spaces for SSE promotion (Mendell and Alain 2013, Jenkins et. al. 2021).

1. Categories of supporting organizations and intermediaries

Supporting organizations and intermediaries play multiple roles in SSE ecosystem development, strengthened by appropriate co-constructed policy action described in the next section. From an institutional perspective, they can be classified in terms of the types of relationship between supporting organizations and government (see Table 47.1).

Table 47.1: Types of relationship between supporting organizations and government

High level of public sector involvement		Low level of public sector involvement			
Public sector agencies: government ministries and departments	Agencies designed and built by the government	Joint agencies with public and private co-ownership and co-responsibility	Private agencies with equity or grants provided by the government	Private agencies with service contracts with the government	Private or non-government sector without government funding

(Source: Jenkins et al. 2021)

There are two main categories of supporting organizations:

- (1) Government ministries, departments other bodies supporting SSE; and
- (2) Intermediaries between government and the SSE community.

1.1 Government ministries, departments, and other bodies

Government ministries, departments, and other bodies with a mandate to work on SSE promotion alongside SSE organizations exist at various territorial levels of government. Examples at national and local levels include:

- The (former) National Secretariat for Solidarity Economy (SENAES) which was established under the Ministry of Labour and Employment in Brazil in 2003 (see below and Box 49.1 in the entry “Local and Territorial Development Plans and SSE”);
- The Korea Social Enterprise Promotion Agency (KoSEA), established under the Ministry of Employment and Labour in the Republic of Korea in 2011;
- The State Secretariat responsible for the Social, Solidarity and Responsible Economy under the Ministry of the Economy, Finance and Recovery of France;
- The Ministry of Microfinance and Social and Solidarity Economy of Senegal;
- The Ministry of Economy and Innovation of Quebec, responsible for the social economy;
- The General Directorate of Employment, Training and Cooperative Promotion of Mexico City’s Ministry of Labour and Employment Promotion;
- The Commission for the Cooperative, Social and Solidarity Economy of the Barcelona City Council, which was set up as a driver and catalyst for PIESS, the impetus plan for the SSE (2016–2019), notably through one of its main agencies, *Barcelona Activa* (see Box 47.1);

Box 47.1: Governmental supporting organization in Barcelona

A key supporting organization for implementation of Barcelona’s impetus plan for the SSE, (*Pla d’Impuls de l’Economia Social i Solidària – 2016–2019*) is *Barcelona Activa*, a municipal entity devoted to employment and local development. Among its strategic lines of action, *Barcelona Activa* aims to achieve “facilitation of the plural economy, promoting SSE, collective entrepreneurship and social innovation”. *Barcelona Activa* implemented this line of action using economic development plans in larger districts of the city, particularly focusing on aspects related to advice and training on SSE, which doubled in 2016–2018. Half of the participants taking part in its SSE-related actions and services did so for the first time, demonstrating a growing interest in SSE within the city, through successful outreach.

Barcelona Activa also manages a new municipal facility called *InnoBa*, inaugurated at the end of 2018. It is the reception and orientation point for SSE projects and offers activities, specialist services, research, training, and spaces for experimentation and incubation for SSE and socioeconomic innovation (Chaves-Avila et al. 2020).

(Summarized in Jenkins et. al. 2021)

1.2 Intermediaries between government and SSE

Intermediaries are generally autonomous bodies (even when created through government initiative), which mediate between government and the SSE community. They undertake a range of supporting functions for SSE development in both policy co-construction and implementation, and other functions not directly linked to government action. In most cases, intermediary organizations are established through non-governmental initiatives or public-private partnerships, to mediate between SSE actors and the government on the interface between the SSE movement and public policy actors. Examples include:

- The *Chambres Régionales de l'Économie Sociale et Solidaire* (CRESS) in France, whose Observatory is coordinated by the Conseil National des CRESS (CNCRESS) in partnership with institutions of the French national government;
- The *Observatorio Español de la Economía Social* and the *Confederación Empresarial Española de la Economía Social* (CEPES) in Spain;
- The Social Policy Observatory of Malopolskie and the Social Economy Development Academy in Krakow, Poland;
- The *Fórum Brasileiro de Economia Solidária* (FBES) in Brazil (see below and Box 49.1 in the entry “Local and Territorial Development Plans and SSE”);
- The *Comité Sectoriel de Main-d'œuvre–Économie Sociale Action Communautaire* (CSMO-ESAC), in Quebec;
- The *Chantier de l'économie sociale* and the Quebec Council of Cooperatives and Mutual Associations in Canada (see below); and
- The Seoul Social Economy Centre (SSEC) in the Republic of Korea (see below).

2. Core activities of supporting organizations and intermediaries

Supporting organizations can carry out SSE empowering activities independent of government action. However, to a large extent, the growth and sustainability of SSE ecosystems depend on enabling public policy tailored to the distinctive characteristics of the SSE. Therefore, the range of activities often covers both policy advocacy, co-design and monitoring (policy “co-construction”), and implementation (“co-production”) (Mendell and Alain 2013). These activities include the following:

- Mobilizing and representing SSEOs and multiple SSE sectors’ interests;
- Reinforcing the common identity and values of SSE;
- Educating policy makers on the specificities and diversity of the SSE sector;
- Helping SSE enterprises to navigate the policy environment;
- Analysing the impact of existing government measures on SSEOs;
- Contributing to capacity building at various stages of organizational/enterprise development;
- Identifying and disseminating best practices and the conditions under which these can be replicated; and
- Facilitating SSEOs’ access to finance and markets (including financial mechanisms adapted to SSE specificities and ways to tap into public and private markets) through financial and technical support (Mendell and Alain 2013, Jenkins et.al. 2021).

These activities can be regrouped into two broad categories:

- (1) Policy co-construction and representation; and
- (2) Capacity-building and other support services (often in the form of co-production with government entities).

2.1 Policy co-construction and representation

The meaningful involvement of representative SSE intermediary organizations and networks in SSE policy formulation and implementation is essential to ensure that measures taken correspond to local conditions and needs. Top-down policy design and implementation (meaning without genuine inclusion of SSE intermediaries) are often prone to fail and tend to instrumentalize SSE to serve state, political or market interests (Jenkins et al. 2021). The institutional method of embedding the relationship between non-governmental supporting organizations/intermediaries and governments in policy

co-construction can be through formal or semi-formal/informal arrangements. These are also manifest in international SSE relations.

2.1.1 Formal relations

In formal settings, the role of intermediary organizations can be instituted in co-constructed laws or signed agreements between the government and SSE intermediaries. For example, in the case of Quebec, the 2013 Social Economy Act (co-constructed at the provincial level) includes a clause which creates a permanent committee of stakeholders overseeing the application of the legislation and/or future amendments, and mobilizing knowledge on SSE as it evolves. Creation of a multistakeholder space for ongoing dialogue (“table of partners”) which advises the government on the elaboration of action plans for the social economy is required by the Act. The *Chantier de l'économie sociale* and the Quebec Council of Cooperatives and Mutual Associations are explicitly mentioned in the law, which they largely contributed to shape (Mendell and Alain 2013; Mendell et al. 2020).

Intermediaries operating within institutionalized formal settings enjoy greater official status, enhancing the visibility of SSE on the policy agenda, and contributing to creating a favourable policy and political environment for SSE (Jenkins et al. 2021). For instance, in 2012, the Mayor of Seoul agreed with the Seoul Social Economy Network (SSEN) to create the Public-Private Policy Making Partnership for the Social Economy in Seoul. Its purpose is to discuss and establish basic plans and measures for SSE policy in the metropolitan area, including joint decisions on monitoring of policy measures and budgets. This process notably contributed to the founding of the Council of Local Governments on the Social Solidarity Economy (CLGSSE), whose mission is to create jobs and revitalize local communities, through promotion of the social economy. The members of the CLGSSE currently consist of 47 local governments across South Korea, including 18 of the 25 self-governing boroughs of Seoul (Yoon and Lee 2020).

2.1.2 Semi-formal/informal relations

Informal arrangements and processes can be an alternative or complement to official institutions, especially when existing institutions are dated and may lack inclusivity. They have the advantage of greater flexibility in bringing a broader range of SSE actors to the table, such as representatives of social movements that do not necessarily belong to a registered organization, and informal SSEOs that would otherwise not be represented, as in the case of the *Fórum Brasileiro de Economia Solidária* (FBES) in Brazil (Utting 2017, Jenkins et al. 2021). Likewise, in Barcelona, the city's Plan to Boost the Social and Solidarity Economy, *Pla d'Impuls de l'Economia Social i Solidària* (PIESS) (2016–2019) contains one landmark innovation: the creation of the *Participatory Area* of the SSE policy. This played an essential role in bringing diverse SSE organizations to converge on a common SSE definition and policy priorities that work for the highly diverse spectrum of SSEOs operating in the territory. In the absence of an adequate formal body, the *Participatory Area* plays the role of an informal consultative and joint policy decision-making body between SSE stakeholders and those in charge of public administration. An added strength in Barcelona's City Council approach was to choose an SSE activist, external to the public administration apparatus and political parties, to lead its 2016–2019 SSE development policy.. This element facilitated participation of the SSE community in the drafting of the SSE policy and internalization of the sector inside the government fabric (Chaves-Avila et al. 2020).

2.1.3 International SSE relations

SSE networks and coalitions also act in policy co-construction at the supra-national regional and global levels. At the regional level, co-construction is particularly advanced within the European Union (EU), through the research and advocacy undertaken by the independent European Economic and Social Committee (the EU's main consultative body with an explicit mandate on promotion of the social economy) and a range of SSE networks, such as Social Economy Europe and the European wing of the Inter-continental Network for Promotion of the Social Solidarity Economy (RIPESS - Europe). At the global level, international SSE networks, such as RIPESS, the SSE International Forum (formerly known as the Mont-Blanc Meetings) and Global Social Economy Forum (GSEF), among many others, provide indispensable expertise and activism as observers in the United Nations Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy (UNTFSSSE), which advocates for SSE in international policy fora, including promotion of this socio-economic model as a strategic means of implementation of the globally-agreed Sustainable Development Goals (www.unsse.org).

(The public policy co-construction dimension of supporting and intermediary organizations' activities is discussed in more detail in the entry "Partnership and co-construction and SSE")

2.2 Capacity-building and other support services

Supporting organizations and intermediaries, whether primarily public or non-governmental entities, provide capacity-building and other services aimed to empower SSEOs through a range of activities that gravitate around the five following clusters:

- i. Training and education;
- ii. Advisory functions (such as tailor-made mentoring and coaching);
- iii. Incubating services such as SSE hubs, incubators or parks;
- iv. Financial support;
- v. Networking and marketing.

In practice, supporting organizations provide one or more of these inter-related clusters of services, in particular, financial support – the effectiveness of which depends on the skills and additional support acquired in the other clusters. These support functions are collectively designed to cater to distinct needs at different stages of SSEO development with the most appropriate interventions to strengthen SSEOs in their given context. Co-constructed public policy for SSE capacity-building can help identify and fill gaps, and facilitate missing institutional connections in the existing territorial SSE support landscape (Jenkins et al. 2021).

2.2.1 Training and education

Training and education can cover business administration-type dimensions pertaining to SSEOE creation and development. These include management, governance, product and service quality, market and finance access, and impact or performance measurement, described in detail in the entry "Management of SSE organizations and enterprises". SSE-specific modules can also be integrated into training programmes for small and medium sized enterprises, as in the case of the Durban cityl branch of South Africa's Small Enterprise Agency (Steinman 2020; Jenkins et. al. 2021). Training and education by

supporting organizations can also cover knowledge of SSE law and policy, as well as advocacy capacity building. They offer training for SSEOs, but also for government officials, providing them with the tools to best fulfil their responsibilities in relation to the creation and implementation of SSE laws and policies, budgeting for SSE, promoting the engagement of SSE actors, and ensuring transparency and accountability in the whole administrative process (Jenkins et al. 2021).

Supporting organizations provide diverse forms of training courses tailor-made for different target groups, which can be provided online and offline. The Social Economy Academy established by the Seoul Metropolitan Government and the Social Enterprise Academy, a public-private partnership in Scotland, are examples of supporting organizations specialized in SSE training (see Box 47.2). Partnerships between international organizations, governments and other stakeholders also exist for training and education programmes, such as the SSE Academy of the International Labour Organization and GSEF's Training and Workshop Series.

Box 47.2: Supporting organizations specialized in SSE training

Social Economy Academy, Seoul

In 2013, the Seoul Metropolitan Government established the Social Economy Academy as a result of a series of consultations with diverse, relevant stakeholders to develop a roadmap for enhancing human resource capabilities in the social economy. Its mission is to provide the basic capability development and practical training needed to start and manage social economy enterprises. The roadmap also contained plans to expand the network of experts and trainees. A survey on past trainees conducted in August 2016 revealed that 88 percent of them continued to work in the social economy sector and that the 31 percent of the trainees who had not initially worked in the field, entered it by either finding jobs or starting their own social enterprises. An online learning platform was also developed to provide information on education and training courses, instructors, learning materials, and jobs available in Seoul's social economy sector (Yoon and Lee 2020).

Social Enterprise Academy, Scotland

Based on a partnership between the Scottish Government, a social enterprise and a conventional private enterprise, the Social Enterprise Academy was established as both a social enterprise and a charity. It offers a broad range of learning and development programmes for individuals and organizations enabling social change. Their tutor network is spread across Scotland, enabling them to deliver programmes with a wide reach in communities across the country. Most of the Academy programmes are developed in partnership with networks, community organizations and other support bodies, therefore allowing tailored programmes to be adapted to meet specific local needs. By 2018, over 10,000 individuals benefited from the Academy's programmes. The model is currently being replicated globally through a network of Social Enterprise Academy Hubs which are managed by partners from local communities and support ecosystems (OECD 2018).

(Summarized in: Jenkins et al. 2021)

2.2.2 Advisory services (mentoring and coaching)

Supporting organizations also provide expert advice to SSEOs, through consultancies, coaching and mentoring services for SSE actors, in particular on niche areas of expertise. They can provide more flexible and individualized support through tailor-made services, notably to address specific needs and challenges faced by SSEOs at various stages of development. For example, the Territorial Development Fund (*Fonds de développement des territoires*; FDT) established by Quebec's National Assembly, funds PME MTL, the largest network of experts in Montreal, providing coaching, training and financing for private sector and social economy entrepreneurs in all industries to support them in launching and growing their enterprises. It offers subsidies to social economy enterprises to support their development from pre-start-up to consolidation and growth (Mendell et al. 2020).

2.2.3 Incubating services

The activities of supporting organizations can also include incubating services. These consist of a combination of capacity building services aimed at helping establish or scale up SSEOs, and include examples such as co-working spaces, training, coaching, consulting services, networking and funding. These services are often combined with other supportive programmes offered to social enterprises such as direct financial support and preferential procurement. Supporting organizations offering incubating services target organizations that aim to establish themselves as SSEOs, improve their product range and quality, and increase their organizational, managerial, financial, as well as social/environmental impact. For example, in Brazil, the National Programme of Incubators for Popular Cooperatives, (which was implemented by SENAES in coordination with the Ministry of Science and Technology and the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development) had, by the end of 2015, provided training and technical support to approximately 1,000 SSE organizations and support organizations via partnerships with universities throughout the country (Utting 2017). Incubating organizations and programmes see their primary goal as accompanying SSEOs until they become independent, financially viable organizations upon completion of the programme (OECD n.d., Steinman 2020).

2.2.4 Financial support

The primacy of social and environmental objectives makes it more difficult for SSEOs to attract funding, especially in the early stages, compared to conventional enterprises aiming for profit maximization, as discussed in detail in the entry "Financing for SSE". Supporting organizations and intermediaries (whether public, private or a combination of the two) play an essential role in providing appropriate forms of financing for SSEOs, corresponding to different stages of their life cycle. These range from direct government subsidies and public or private grants, start-up capital, low- (or zero-) interest rate loans, loan guarantees, to more innovative financial mechanisms such as crowd-funding and complementary social currencies. Social banking and other variants of "solidarity finance", such as cooperative mutual funds, are common features in SSE ecosystems (Jenkins et al. 2021).

Intermediaries can channel and/or match public and private funds to support SSE development through well-adapted and innovative means. For example, the Seoul Social

Investment Fund was established by the Metropolitan Government in 2012 through partnerships with intermediary organizations and partners in private social finance. These organizations would receive investments and loans without interest on the condition that they would match the amount they received from the Social Investment Fund one-to-one, or one-to-three at the very least, reinvesting or loaning the funds to SSEOEs at interest rates no higher than three per cent per annum (Yoon and Lee 2020). Likewise, the *Chantier de l'économie sociale* and the *Conseil québécois de la coopération et de la mutualité* receive funds from the Ministry of Economy and Innovation of Quebec to undertake projects in collaboration with other social economy organizations and actors to support SSEOEs. Their intermediary nature allows greater civil society engagement with the social economy while pursuing projects which reflect their mandate (Mendell et al. 2020). Ten years after its creation, in 2007 the *Chantier* also established its own trust (the *Fiducie du Chantier de l'économie sociale*). The trust acts as an intermediary between the financial market and social economy businesses, thereby mutualizing the risk associated with investing in the SSE while simultaneously creating financial products that are better adapted to social enterprises (Barco Serrano et al. 2019).

2.2.5 Networking and marketing

Networking and marketing are also essential dimensions of services provided by supporting organizations and intermediaries, especially in the more advanced stages of SSEO development. These tools facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experiences across SSEOEs. Networking also offers opportunities to develop synergies and complementarities among SSE actors and with private and public actors. Similarly, networks are useful to create business partnerships and value chains among SSEOEs that enable access to markets or facilitate access to finance. For instance, networks can help SSEOEs identify partners to share and co-own infrastructure and facilities such as storage space or e-commerce platforms, which can be especially useful when they are small, lack resources or are located in remote areas (albeit depending upon adequate access to information and communication technology infrastructure) (Jenkins et al. 2021).

Linked to policy co-construction, networking also enables “political capacity building”, in terms of collectively mobilizing resources to advocate for SSE-friendly policies with governments. Many SSE networks, some primarily funded by governments, carry out on-the-ground SSEOE development support, as well as advocacy functions to improve the legal and policy-enabling environment for SSE in their territory (OECD/EU 2017, Jenkins et al. 2021). As mentioned above, supporting organizations and intermediaries can carry out many of the activity clusters described in this section simultaneously. For example, the Seoul Social Economy Centre (SSEC), a leading intermediary SSE support organization also set up as a public-private partnership, includes among its tasks: recruiting and providing development support for the actors of the social economy; identifying and supporting the commercialization of business models of SSOEs; providing management consulting and marketing support for SSEs; fostering online and offline hubs of networking among SEEs; facilitating public procurement of products from SSEs; as well as researching and developing SSE policy measures (Yoon and Lee 2020) (see the entry “Institutional ecosystem of SSE” for additional insights on functions, characteristics, diversity and complementarity of supporting organizations and intermediaries in SSE ecosystems).

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