

## Preface

Over several decades, neoliberalism has shaped economic activities and relations in much of the world. Although there are many variants of neoliberalism, they all share in common two fundamental assumptions: we, human beings, can maximize self-interest based on an economic calculation of costs and benefits, and the market is inherently efficient and self-regulated. The policy conclusion drawn from this assumption is that a stronger free market enhances human wellbeing.

These assumptions and the policy conclusion are patently false. Calculated self-interest may be one element that determines our behaviour but so too are non-economic interests and values associated with social norms, rights, obligations, reciprocity and morals. An inherently efficient and self-regulating market is just a “utopian idea” whose original imposition and catastrophic collapse was the subject of Karl Polanyi’s *The Great Transformation*.

The social and solidarity economy (SSE) which has gained its currency across the world over the past two decades provides an alternative approach to promoting human well-being, social justice and economic and sustainable development. Although the meaning of SSE and key features are contested, its constituent organizations such as cooperatives, associations, mutuals, women’s self-help groups and social enterprises play a significant role in creating and protecting economic activities and social relations from commercialization and bureaucratization and transforming them into participatory and democratic ones. In a nutshell, the SSE is all about social control and democratization of the economy understood as a vast set of social relations.

Despite the growing recognition of the transformative potential of SSE and the amount of academic and policy-oriented research related to the SSE, it remains a relatively new concept to many. There is therefore a need for high-quality knowledge on this topic and information to guide policymakers, practitioners and researchers. Yet, there are very few sources that comprehensively examine the attributes, dynamics, opportunities and challenges associated with SSE in various contexts. This is what has motivated the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on SSE (UNTFSSSE) to convene leading experts to produce the SSE Encyclopedia, which is intended as an essential tool for raising awareness of SSE and promoting SSE organizations and enterprises at local, national and international levels.

The SSE Encyclopedia is divided into four parts: Histories, Concepts and Theories; Actors and Organizations; Linkages to Development; and Enabling Environment and Governance. Part I. Histories, Concepts, and Theories begins with the entry “Origins and Histories of the Social and Solidarity Economy”, which reveals the collective amnesia about the origins of social and economic organizations based on democratic solidarity initiated by various groups (indigenous self-organization in South America, women and African American in North America, and pioneering workers in Europe). This is followed by entries dealing with the contested contemporary meanings of the SSE, and how SSE relates to alternative and heterodox economic approaches and social movements. Part II has entries explaining and introducing the key actors and organizations constituting the SSE, ranging from cooperatives and mutuals to associations, NGOs, foundations and social enterprises, to women’s self-help

groups and community-based organizations. Entries on actors who play an increasingly important role but receive less research attention, such as LGBTIQ+, youth, migrants and refugees, are also featured in Part II. The contribution of SSE to inclusive and sustainable development is the overarching theme of Part III. The entries highlight the SSE's linkages with aspects of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to poverty, hunger, health care, education, gender, water, energy, inequality, housing, tourism, sustainable production, social services, peace, culture, sports, and leisure sectors, finance and investment.. Part IV's entries address the question of how to promote the SSE in global, national and local contexts; what institutions and policies are necessary; and how the SSE organizations and enterprises are or should be governed and managed. Key elements examined include the institutional ecosystem of the SS; challenges and obstacles related to the management and governance of the SSE organizations and enterprises; and SSE as a source of resilience in the context of multiple crises.

Through these entries, this encyclopaedia aims to address several challenges of research on SSE. Firstly, it adopts a global perspective, departing from the national perspectives, Eurocentrism and trans-Atlanticism in dealing with the key themes and issues. The examples of SSE organizations and enterprises introduced in the entries are from the countries of all continents which highlight the universal applicability of the SSE to diverse contexts. Secondly, given the diverse backgrounds and experience of the authors and editors, the encyclopedia aims to communicate with a broad international readership.

The entries in this encyclopedia bring out the complex relationship between economic, social and political dimensions, and how SSE actors and organizations are positioned differently in relation to the aspiration of transforming the economy, polity and society. We hope this encyclopedia will provide policymakers, academics and practitioners with a guide on how to further the utilitarian purpose and realize the transformative potential of the SSE in terms of democratization, systemic change and ultimately emancipation. By providing legitimate and credible information and knowledge on key issues, we also expect to introduce the SSE to those not familiar with it, offer them an overview of a wide range of topics associated with it, and allow SSE stakeholders to check facts or gain additional knowledge on the topic.

The Encyclopedia (subtitled "systematic dictionary of the science, arts and crafts"), edited by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert, was an exemplary work of those who led the eighteenth-century Enlightenment in France. It contributed to the progress and a positive transformation of human society. We hope our SSE Encyclopedia plays a similar role and will inform both current and future generations.

The SSE Encyclopedia Editorial Committee would like to express its gratitude to all the authors who contributed entries, as well as to the UNTFSSSE members and observers who provided valuable advice. We also thank Daniel Mather and Catherine Elgar of Edward Elgar who have supported this project from beginning to end by providing advice and encouragement. Our special thanks go to Natalie Taylor, Emily Kostanecki, Billy Southern and Carl Hughes who copyedited all the entries in such a short time frame.

**The SSE Encyclopedia Editorial Committee**