



LOOKING UP

Concept note for future projects



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In collaboration with:



**LOOKING UP – A training path from experiences of local
development towards European Social Solidarity Economy strategies
– 2023-2-IT02-KA210-ADU-000179929**

TITLE

Building community: from concrete needs to co-design processes

INTRO

The Looking UP project, led by Solidarius Italia, CRIES and UFISC, worked, over the course of a year and a half and through a participative process with a number of small organisations from 3 different countries (Italy, France and Romania), on the construction and realisation of training and exchange opportunities on local development issues within the framework of the Social Solidarity Economy.

These were the goals:

- Improving skills, awareness, civic engagement of small organisations in the framework of ecological transition and Social Solidarity Economy (SSE);
- Increasing the awareness of small organisations about local and Eu level strategies and policies guiding development actions, enhancing their capacity to look up and know what's happens around them for a bottom-up participation and an improved effectiveness in their own contexts;
- Strengthening transnational networks among organisations working in similar fields, enhancing common approach, and implementing the cooperation in future project.

Starting from the training needs analysis, during an initial in-presence workshop in July 2024, we co-designed a programme of 9 webinars (*Looking Up Tuesdays*) that would allow for in-depth analysis and discussion, with theoretical contributions and analysis of case studies, on three topics in particular:

- Networking and development of solidarity and community economies placed based in urban and rural areas;
- Local participatory development and ecological transition in artistic and cultural alternatives places;
- Urban-rural relations through food and its supply chains

Following the webinars - open to the participation of interested people and

members of other associations and local networks - and through another in-presence workshop (May 2025), the partners and small associations involved worked to identify and enhance the common elements between the 3 topics addressed and to synthesise what had emerged (good practices, methodologies, reference policies at national and European level) in order to trace the trajectories of a local development that:

- is rooted in communities
- moves within the transformative horizon of the Social Solidarity Economy
- maintains a transversal and systemic approach
- is capable of operating at local level, while connecting with other territories at the same level (horizontal networks), at national and European level.

Within these trajectories, it will be possible to find common ground, to discuss current practices and tested strategies. From here, generative networks can emerge that strengthen small organisations in their capacity to act and interact also at a political level. This work of synthesis and emergence has also made it possible to identify the main 'risks' of those who intend to promote local development within the horizon of the Social Solidarity Economy and which represent the starting point that motivates this Concept Note: these are elements and needs that require further responses and which may therefore form the basis of new project actions.

Two, in particular, are the elements/risks on which we believe it is important to continue working:

- 1- the risk that, in order to follow public funding, community activation processes are triggered based on artificial needs that refer to the objectives of the associations and organisations involved in the area, rather than those of the community itself. For the members of the community, these represent processes aimed at responding to induced needs. Induced like those proposed by the market and therefore artificial, not vectors of transformation either of the condition of people or of the context.
- 2- the risk of taking a localist, closed and self-referential approach, completely centred on local processes and not able to look up and move in a systemic and transversal way for the local development of the territory.

These are elements that, with different modalities and intensities, can generate fragmentation and obstacles to networking, self-referentiality and closure, processes of exclusion instead of inclusive dynamics. In this way, the very prospect of realising

even economically sustainable and supportive communities in a participatory manner comes to be limited and episodic.

Starting from these elements of risk, in this document, we outline the notes for a future project that continues the work of exchanging experiences between small realities that in different parts of Europe share values and vision and can therefore continue to learn from each other through a comparison of processes (and not only practices) and the construction or sharing of challenges.

PARTNERSHIP

Italy

- Solidarius Italy
- LoFoio
- Il Giardino dell'Ardiglione

France

- UFISC
- Actes if
- Le Shakirail
- Les Poussieres

Romania

- CRIES
- Reciproc
- ASAT

DURATION

18 – 24 months

TARGET

Small organisations operating and directing their local development activities within the framework, values and principles of Social Solidarity Economy.

This means:

- being anchored to a local dimension and being aware of the needs of the communities and territories in which they operate, having/living a space in

that territory;

- working to create an impact on the people who inhabit that territory starting from their own needs:
 1. from an economic point of view: non-lucrative activities , decent work, reinvestment in the community, addressing to the general interest;
 2. from a social point of view: social inclusion, networking, but also horizontal internal governance;
 3. from an environmental point of view: constant care to the issue of ecological transition and climate change.

These organisations could be:

- Cultural associations, voluntary associations, informal groups
- Social enterprises and cooperatives that meet at least 2 of the criteria listed below:
 1. Financial report under 70k euros/year
 2. Less than 50 employees
 3. Bottom up and horizontal governance, codified in its Statute
 4. Be included and active in social economy supply chains

Incomes from activities and membership fees must be predominant and, in any case, no funding from a single external source may exceed 30% of the annual budget (including public funding from the same source, even in the form of a free of charge loan/comodato, in which case the value of the property/place is taken into account).

OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this proposal can be translated into the following questions:

- How to listen, collect and answer to core and specific needs of the communities?
- How can communication and networking between small organisations be fostered to increase the effectiveness of their action and counteract self-referentiality and localism?
- How to work at the local level while staying connected to other territories, as well as the national and European level?

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- Co-creating peer-to-peer training opportunities
- Enhancing expertise and skills of small organisations born out of everyday practices
- Exchanging and testing practices, methodologies and tools on (and against) common issues that can be reproduced and transferred to different contexts
- Adapt the governance of small organisations working in the field of SSE to new challenges: sustainability, resilience, representativeness, diversity, political and democratic urgency, capacity to pass on and be replaced
- Creating long-term connections and fostering an ongoing exchange

ACTIVITIES

At the heart of the project proposal are experiences conducted by small organisations working for local development in their communities that can be compared in order to identify innovative and effective methodologies and tools to address common challenges and to nurture reflection and training on broader and more urgent issues, from a social, cultural, economic and political perspective.

The comparison will be possible first of all through the creation of an analysis grid that allows to observe and reconstruct the processes that each practice implements through common elements including:

- ✓ community needs analysis;
- ✓ co-design of the responses and participatory processes;
- ✓ partnerships and networks;
- ✓ skills produced and transferred;
- ✓ monitoring (check points and indicators);
- ✓ governance;
- ✓ economic models and fundings;
- ✓ sustainability of the implemented actions;
- ✓ communication and storytelling

Action 1

Kick off meeting

During the kick off meeting, all partners will finalise and share the project tools from the analysis grid. This will be the moment to define the programme for Actions 2 and 3.

Action 2

Mobilities

In connection with one or more elements of the grid identified as common, each experience involved will be able to present an experimented methodology/tool or talk about an ongoing process. 6 thematic mobilities (2 per country) will be organised in which a specific aspect will be explored in depth also through field visits and meetings with local communities, in which know-how will be transferred and the skills of the host organisation will be enhanced.

At the end of each mobility, a podcast will be created to report and share the process.

Action 3

Online sessions

Between one mobility and the next, online and open training sessions will be organised on key concepts progressively identified during the course of the project

Action 4

Participatory archive

The communication and dissemination work of the exchange process will be carried out transversally throughout the duration of the project. A webapp will be created as a participatory archive of the methodologies and tools made available by the various organisations, which will continue to be fed over time and will be open to contributions from those who wish to participate.

Action 5

Final event

The final event of the project will be organised during La PAS festival (CRIES) or Pop Mind (UFISC): events organised annually by a partner in which the whole partnership will actively participate on the one hand by proposing activities that can enrich the festival itself in an international perspective, on the other hand by

organising a return of the results that can strengthen community building in the local context, and networking at European level.

RESULTS

- ✓ Analysis grid for good local development practices and SSE
- ✓ Participatory archive (webapp)
- ✓ 6 podcasts

IMPACT

The project will have an impact on several levels:

- At local and national level: each partner organisation will have had the opportunity to host a mobility event, to share the process underway and strengthen its narrative in front of the community, and to enhance its know-how;
- At a European level: the skills and knowledge of the small organisations will be implemented and the contribution of each one will be valorised for the construction of a wider collective knowledge; methodologies and tools will be shared and disseminated, which may be useful to other small organisations also in other countries; the continuation of the archiving process through the web app tool and thus the generative potential of the project itself will be guaranteed

The project will also have an impact on several dimensions:

- On the social one: by improving, quantitatively and qualitatively, the participation of citizens living in the places and communities where the small organisations work;
- On the cultural one: in the dissemination of a participatory local development model, anchored in the needs of communities and the values of the SSE;
- On the political one: in strengthening and experimenting innovative tools to face new challenges by increasing the capacity of small organisations to influence institutional policies at various levels.