

ASTRA PROJECT

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Summary of the Theoretical-conceptual framework of WP3

WP3. Economic sustainability transition

*The main goal of WP3 is to provide new empirically proven and comparative European knowledge about the **realistic and concrete applicability of new sustainable economic models** beyond conventional business and SMEs. This is the economic aspect of the*



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Transdisciplinary Sustainability Transition Research (TSTR) regarding applicability for tackling Major Societal Challenges (MSC) by Social Work (SW).

Ongoing development

The economic sustainability tackled in WP3 of the ASTRA transformative research applies to the necessary sociocultural and technological transition to implement. It will thus explore, together with the components of new sustainable territorial development, particular sustainable economic models – such as circular economy, green economy, collaborative economy, community economy, care economy and the commons. Those are usable for radically new type of inclusion of people with migrant background and young people at the margins on conventional labour market. Therefore, it is worth investigating the potential of emerging local and regional alternative economic approaches for new or revisited practicable avenues to address the Major Societal Challenges (MSC).

Realistic opportunities, practice-research approaches and already implemented new economic models do exist, notably in and around initiatives of the so-called “Social and Solidarity Economy” (SSE). A very large theoretical and empirical background from all continents and several disciplinary trends (economics, management, sociology, political science, law, public administration, statistics, etc.) has been developed for several decades around this notion/concept (Chaves-Avila and Monzón 2018, CIRIEC et al. 2017; Laville 2017; Lévesque and Mendell 2016; Utting 2015, to cite only a few). However, the discipline is rather recent in comparison to others, and has not yet percolated in other mainstream fields nor in other disciplines.

Numerous attempts to define and delineate “Social and Solidarity Economy” do exist. For the sake of universality and simplicity, we will use the one proposed by the UNTFSSSE:

SSE encompasses organizations and enterprises that have explicit economic and social (and often environmental) objectives; involve varying degrees and forms of cooperative, reciprocal/mutual, associative and solidarity relations between workers, producers and consumers; and practice workplace democracy and self-management. SSE includes traditional forms of cooperatives and mutual associations, as well as women’s self-help groups, community forestry groups, social provisioning organizations or ‘proximity services’, fair trade organizations, associations of informal sector workers, social enterprises, and community currency and alternative finance schemes.

Source: UNTFSSSE (UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy)



Very diverse theoretical developments based on different geographical, cultural, institutional/legal, social and environmental settings bring about rich outcomes. Throughout the entire duration of the project, CIRIEC's Documentation Centre together with the ESRs will develop and enrich a reference list, which will aim at showing the plurality of approaches worldwide to be used as inspiration and enhancement for cross-disciplinary knowledge building. Nonetheless, it remains necessary to advertise and better disseminate these alternative models and viewpoints across disciplines. This transdisciplinary approach favoured by the ASTRA project takes a lot of time, exchanges and discussion between specialists, scientific experts and practitioners from diverse origins, in order not only to be reciprocally nurtured, but also to shape common understanding and develop meaningful concepts and theory.

On top of this, ASTRA has the ambition to address the needed synergetic combination of the quantitative economic resource agenda (i.e. finite natural resources and their necessary sustainable exploitation) and the social agenda (affordable and fair access and just (re-)distribution of income), including participation and contributive justice (Healy 2020; Matthies et al. 2019; Safri et al. 2017; Salustri 2019; Utting 2015, UNTFSSSE and its Knowledge Hub).

SSE economic models are based on human beings rather than on capital, on economic democracy and participatory bottom-up governance rather than on centralised top-down unilateral decisions, and on inclusive involvement of all interested stakeholders concerned by a common approach to sustainable and inclusive development, starting from the local level before reaching out more largely (CIRIEC et al. 2017; Moreau et al. 2017; Utting 2015).

The main target group of persons involved in the experiences to be analysed, namely the beneficiaries, the social workers, the stakeholders co-constructing or co-producing the solutions/initiatives, will be the will focus on young people facing precariousness and/or people with a migration background in vulnerable communities.

Challenges and approaches related to the economic sustainability transition

- Several types of SSE models and their outcomes are considered and investigated in WP3.
- The dynamic field of circular economy (including up-cycling, re-use and sharing) has been developing in numerous economic activity sectors, with several technical/industrial and interrelated environmental issues. It offers several perspectives, in particular by creating and capturing value, and regarding employment opportunities for precarious and vulnerable people who are accompanied by social workers in their socio-economic reintegration trajectory.



Moreover, circular economy allows creating sustainable development per se, through its socio-economic and territorial deployment and re-shaping.

- Community economy/ics is another concept embedded in the SSE providing ongoing co-constructed solutions unfolding in a “pluriverse”. In particular, disadvantaged ethnic groups suffering from racism do find in SSE new ways to allow for their societal inclusion at local/community level and development of their collective well-being. The so-called Black social economy, namely the SSE for and by People of African Descent (PAD) deserves a specific investigation, because it is insufficiently explored. It also reveals very specific cultural and original constructs, diverse lifestyles that can offer new insights and new innovative and sustainable transition paths based on economic activity and securing financial income for the communities.
- The care sector is an essential field of deployment of SSE activities. Not only is it a social central service across all communities and all stages in life, but it offers numerous comparative models to check: economic performance versus wellbeing; financial sustainability versus socially inclusive achievements; interrelated major societal changes (demography – aging population and lower birth rate –, employment – higher woman participation on labour market –, living modes more mobility – and family values – increase in divorce cases and loneliness) and how public, private for profit, non-profit and SSE solutions do tackle them. In particular, the informal care sector has greatly developed in Europe at the expense of the wellbeing of care workers, especially migrant women from Central and Eastern Europe. SSE strategies to improve the situation, to organise and value paid and unpaid work will be looked at.
- Assessing social impact is essential to measure the effects of social inclusion programmes. Assessment tools do exist, but for whom, for which purposes, to measure what, etc. The questions and issues to tackle are numerous and sometimes with contradictory goals (e.g. saving public money versus accompanying social inclusion programmes in the long run; vouchers-systems possibly inciting to shop around versus permanent social work in a location; impact for the individual beneficiary versus a collectively constructed SSE approach for the benefit of the local community. Various experiences and implementations of social impact measurement tools and methods in various settings and types of social economy enterprises will enrich the comparative approach.
- The spatial and urban dimension is also essential for SSE initiatives, since these co-shape their environment in full participatory approaches with the people concerned and the social workers accompanying them. As another way of doing business, SSE co-constructs collective sustainable answers to the major societal



challenges; it does so with and for the persons involved, via democratic governance, education and enhancement of their empowerment and capabilities to be full actors of their own life. To do so, the persons involved, especially vulnerable persons, need to feel comfortable, secure, and be surrounded by a trusting environment to develop their societal wellbeing and inclusion. Consequently, understanding and incorporating the spatial dimension is also essential for deprived urban environments confronted with complex sustainability transitions.

Social and Solidarity economy offers per se transversal approaches. WP3 will highlight and explicit those for the better understanding and reproducibility of SSE models in various contexts and settings.

The final objective is to provide new knowledge of economic TSTR to tackle MSC, new tools applicable to SW, as well as some potential policy recommendations.

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