

International Social Economy Research Conference 2025 in Bordeaux

(Sciences Po Bordeaux), 27-29 octobre 2025)

« SSE's role in the socio-ecological transition »

Framework proposal

On April 18, 2023, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution recognizing that "*social and solidarity economy can contribute to the achievement and localization of the Sustainable Development Goals*"¹. In other words, the social and solidarity economy (SSE) appears as a lever for implementing the socio-ecological transition in territories, through a logic that is both multi-actor and multi-scalar (SDG 17 on "doing together" / partnerships). However, we need to define this more precisely. Research into the relationship between the SSE and local development has been well established for some twenty years, yet it is still rare to find explicit reference to the socio-ecological transition, while socio-economic initiatives abound at local level and transition scenarios stress territorial cooperation strategies in which SSE players are particularly involved.

We propose to study the synergies between the territorial dynamics of the SSE and the socio-ecological transition, defined by the ILO as having to "greening the economy in a way that is as fair and inclusive as possible to everyone concerned, creating decent work opportunities and leaving no one behind". This transition, described as "just", concerns not only ecology, but also the transition to a formal economy and the digital transition, particularly for the self-employed. This raises the broader question of the SSE's ability to regulate the economy². What role do SSE territorial dynamics play in the socio-ecological transition? In the current multi-faceted crisis, is the SSE merely a shock absorber? Is the SSE condemned to seeing its social innovations confined to a reparative logic, or recuperated by the State or the market in the event of success? Or could it be the start of a shift? Can it develop sufficiently to take on all or part of the socio-ecological transition without calling into question the dominant socio-economic regime as a whole? Or does it, on the contrary, provide the foundations for an alternative socio-economic regime based on a twofold reembedding of the economy into society and nature?

To address these questions, we need to propose a global approach to the SSE. This is why the analysis of the territory, as a meso-economic space bearing a relative autonomy from the global regime, has been preferred³. It offers a framework for conceiving not only a theory of the SSE in transition on a local scale, but also a theory of transformation, i.e. of the meso/macro dialectic without which the transition would remain incomplete. This theoretical approach represents a major innovation for the SSE, which is often criticized for being more of a *technè* than an *epistémè*. However, it needs to be implemented in close collaboration with socio-

¹ United Nations General Assembly Resolution, April 18th 2023 on "*Promoting the social and solidarity economy for sustainable development*".

² Robert Boyer, *L'économie sociale et solidaire. Une utopie réaliste pour le XXI^e siècle ?*, Paris, Les Petits Matins, 2023.

³ Thomas Lamarche *et al.*, « Saisir les processus méso : une approche régulationniste », *Économie appliquée*, n°1, 2021, p.13-49.



economic players, who will consolidate its empirical foundations through their experiments and find resources to reinforce their impact.

With this in mind, the Social Economy Research Conference intends to place social-ecological transition at the heart of three processes: 1. SSE in transition; 2. the territorial regimes of SSE in transition; 3. the transformation strategies of SSE in transition. These elements will constitute the three questions running through the research conference and all its themes.

1. *SSE in transition*

What is SSE in transition, meaning SSE that contributes to the socio-ecological transition? It is easy to hypothesize that, while the SSE is predisposed to transition, only part of its field is committed to it, since the SSE was first built to serve its members, and at a time when the ecological question was invisibilized. But what are its contours? The transition is contributing to the recomposition of the boundaries of public action, which necessarily impacts SSE organizations, whose mediating functions between particular interests and the general interest are mobilized. Are there SSE phases in transition? How does the SSE integrate justice, of which it is historically the bearer, into the transition? How does it manage to preserve its specific features while capitalism itself takes over the transition? This may concern a particular sector, but more generally it refers to the conditions for the emergence of a SSE in transition, and the steps needed to achieve it. What are the clues that make it possible to grasp this SSE in transition? Can we locate the coordinates of each of these organizations on a map of the SSE in transition?

2. *Territorial regimes of SSE in transition*

This institutional approach to SSE organizations refers more broadly to the arrangements into which they fit. While SSE is defined by specific rules at the level of its organizations (democratic governance, non-profit, social utility), it is above all a meso-economic space that is empowered by its collaborative processes, i.e. by its synergies both between SSE components and with their allies, whether public or private, to create system effects (production, consumption, credit, finance, insurance, etc.)⁴. This is in line with new approaches that seek to embed SSE in a project that goes beyond it, such as the commons⁵, which propose embedding the economy in local communities, and thus making ecosystems, whether territorial or sectoral, the agents of change. What are the territorial dynamics of SSE in transition to rethink modes of organization and governance? How can we support the players? What progress indicators are needed to support co-construction processes? This involves analyzing, from the point of view of the SSE in transition, modes of collective action as well as systemic and ecosystemic regulation methods in territories.

3. *Transformation strategies of SSE in transition*

⁴ Nadine Richez-Battesti et Thomas Lamarche. (dir.). (2023). *Approches mésoéconomiques des coopératives des régulations socio-politiques* [numéro 34]. *Revue de la régulation, capitalisme, institutions, pouvoirs*. <https://doi.org/10.4000/regulation.21951>

⁵ Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the commons : the evolution of institutions for collective action*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990.



The risk of a territorial approach, however, would be to constrain SSE to the local and to a role as a crutch for the dominant socio-economic regime. As a result, it needs to be embedded in a theory of transformation that reformulates the meso-macro dialectic⁶. How can the SSE in transition influence the socio-economic regime, or even replace it? Under what conditions can territorial regimes and SSE ecosystems reach the global order? Which sectors should SSE prioritize? This refers in particular to approaches to transformative social innovation (TSI), which are concerned with "the process by which social innovation challenges, modifies or replaces dominant institutions in a specific socio-material context"⁷, i.e. a socio-technical system and a socio-political system geared to the living world. Within the latter, a new field is opening up concerning their capacity to change scale in order to make a success of the transition, based on polycentric governance with an approach that is not only integral, managing to cover the main economic relationships, but also translocal, organizing at both local and extra-local levels⁸.

List of topics

1. SSE statistics, reporting and social impact measurements
2. SSE and the ecological and energy sectors
3. SSE territorial ecosystems and transition
4. SSE identities, hybridizations and innovations
5. Financing SEE and its organizations
6. SSE networks and public policies
7. SSE, education & civic rights
8. SSE, decent work and the informal economy
9. SSE and the fight against poverty and the care economy
10. SSE and agri-food system
11. Commons and cooperative public services
12. SSE and intersectionality
13. Other

⁶ Benoît Lévesque, « Les innovations sociales et les transformations : un enchaînement qui ne va pas de soi », in Juan-Luis Klein *et al.* (dir.), *La transformation sociale par l'innovation sociale*, Québec, PUQ, p.21-33.

⁷ Bonno Pel *et al.*, « Towards a theory of transformative social innovation : A relational framework and 12 propositions », *Research Policy*, Vol. 49, Issue 8, October 2020, Disponible à l'adresse : <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S004873332030158X>

⁸ Kristiaan P.W. Kok *et al.*, « Governing translocal experimentation in multi-sited transition programs and challenges », *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions*, Vol. 43, June 2022, p.393-407.



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