

STATE-OF-THE-ART AND CROSS- COUNTRY NEEDS ANALYSIS

Synthesis Report



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Executive summary

The purpose of this report is to provide a comprehensive review of the educational provisions on the Social Economy across 5 countries (UK, France, Spain, Italy and Greece) and set the foundations for understanding the ways in which a Social Economy (hereafter SE) programme could be designed to meet the needs of the various SE actors (in particular, educators, students and organisations). At the initial stage of our project, we conducted desk based research on existing provisions in order to create a map of the programmes currently offered at master's level in higher education. In addition to reviewing existing educational and training programmes, we conducted a range of informal interviews with educators as well as SE umbrella organisations. Through this process we have established a network of SE actors we would like to involve in the follow up stages of our project. The aim of this first phase in the project was to identify existing educational programmes and distinguish them in terms of approaches and initiatives, their focus, thematic content, pedagogical approaches, and the involvement of SE organisations. In order to produce a comprehensive and rigorous analysis of these existing programmes, it was helpful to place them within the broader geo-political context of the different ways in which the SE is institutionalised and defined in each of the countries involved in the study. Hence, defining SE was crucial for the analysis that followed. Once our mapping and review of the existing provisions was complete, we found that:

- Most programmes are quite general in terms of their focus on social economy or social entrepreneurship, and thus the development of programmes with more focus on a particular area might be worthwhile.
- Most programmes employ traditional pedagogical approaches, even though there are some examples of innovative practices, such as connecting knowledge with practical experiences or involving students in the co-creation of knowledge.
- Collaboration between Higher Education Institutions (HEI) and SE actors take different forms yet it tends to be at the delivery stage rather than in the development of the programmes or the co-creation of knowledge. Therefore, it might be worthwhile exploring ways to strengthen collaboration between HEI and SE actors. In addition, there are very few examples of service-learning methodologies.

On completion of the state-of-the-art analysis (phase one) we conducted interviews with three groups of SE actors, namely educators, students and SE organisations (phase two). To identify and recruit our participants we employed a convenience sampling technique and snowballing, using our established networks as a starting point. We conducted 65 interviews (29 educators, 17 students and 19 SE organisations) across the 4 countries of the project's partners. Our aim was to explore their various perspectives on the general approaches to

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the SE that educational programmes should take, the content of the curriculum, the pedagogical methods that would be most effective, and the levels and nature of participation they felt SE organisations should have in the programmes.

Based on our findings, we have concluded that the ways in which a SE programme could be designed to meet the needs of the various SE actors include:

- Designing programmes on social economy that have a strong grounding in SE values and be open enough to attract a variety of different audiences and adapt to different and changing environments. The values of the social economy should figure strongly in the programme and inform its approach, content and methods. This strong grounding in social values however should be accompanied by an opening up to a diversity of audiences.
- Developing programmes that provide a good balance between theory and practice. Several areas of theoretical knowledge and practical competencies were highlighted as essential to the development of the social economy.
- Ensuring a diversity in the modes of delivery so as to attract and tailor for a diverse pool of students, and a diversity of teaching methods to promote more interactive and experiential learning. While there is already an element of interactive, action-learning in existing programmes, it was felt that this should be developed through more innovative methods of both teaching and assessment that would build stronger ties between students and SE organisations, as well as encourage peer-to-peer learning so that all parties can contribute to the creation of knowledge. Overall, there was strong agreement about the need for more practice-based learning, more flexible methods of delivery and assessment that would cater more closely to students' various needs and circumstances, and stronger networking opportunities between students and SE organisations, including at international level.
- Extending the role of social economy actors in the programmes beyond delivery to include the shaping of knowledge and curriculum. Another suggestion to expand the role of SE actors was to involve them as beneficiaries of services provided by students.

Introduction

The aim of this report is twofold, firstly to provide an overview of existing practices in SE education in the 4 partner countries and France, and secondly, to identify how these existing provisions could be built upon to meet the needs of SE organisations more fully and effectively. In the first state-of-the-art part of the report, we review existing educational and training programmes and identify innovative pedagogical approaches that promote the collaboration between HEIs and SE organisations as well as best practices offering experiential learning opportunities. This analysis of the current state of the art leads to the needs analysis in the second part of the report. Here we draw on interviews with HEIs educators, SE organisations, and current or ex-students of SE related masters programmes to identify learning needs in terms of theoretical knowledge, skills, pedagogical methods and collaboration between HEIs and SE organisations. The third part of the report contains (as appendices) the extended country reports for both the state of the art and the needs analysis. Please note that while our state of the art report includes France, our needs analysis focused on the four countries of the project's partners. The rationale behind the inclusion of France in the state of the art stage of the project was based on our assessment that social economy educational programmes are relatively well established in France and could help inform our second stage on needs analysis research in the four countries of the project's partners.

PART 1: STATE-OF-THE-ART IN SE EDUCATION – A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GREECE, ITALY, FRANCE, SPAIN AND THE UK

This review of existing educational and training programmes is based on desk research and interviews with educators as well as SE umbrella organisations. The aim here is to map existing educational programmes in terms of approaches and initiatives, focus, thematic content, structure, pedagogical approaches, and the involvement of SE organisations. However, before exploring the content and approaches of these existing programmes, it was necessary to place them within the broader context of the SE and the different ways in which it is institutionalised and defined in each of the countries involved in the study.

1.1. Institutional context of social economy in the country

There are different historical, political and legal contexts defining, driving, and influencing the Social Economy in the various countries analysed; this in turn influences the type of organisations that are most commonly considered as forming part of the sector and the terminology used (e.g. here a particularly salient distinction is between social enterprise, cooperatives and social economy), as well as the level of institutional support and recognition. There is a strong institutional framework in Italy, France and Spain grounded in those countries' long history of cooperative enterprises. In these countries, the Social Economy has been playing a central role in meeting social needs as well as in the economy more generally (e.g. employment provision); and this has been reflected in the recognition of the sector in public policy, the development of umbrella organisations, and more recently, the development of legislation governing the sector. The institutional framework is more fragmented in Greece where support for cooperatives (and in particular agricultural cooperatives) has been subject to ebbs and flows following political changes; however solidarity and cooperative organisations and the social economy sector attracted renewed interest following the 2008 crisis. In all four countries (i.e. Greece, Spain, Italy, France) the social economy gained legislative recognition in 2011. But while the social economy is securely anchored in the cooperative tradition and solidarity movements in these countries, the concept of social enterprise is quite recent, unlike in the UK where the idea of social enterprise has been more firmly established, but the concept of Social Economy is not as extensively used. Other terms such as that of inclusive economy and social sector appear more prominent in the UK and are used to broadly describe a range of social organisations and networks, (e.g. cooperatives, mutual societies, charities, associations and trusts). In recent years, there has been an attempt to consolidate or institutionalise the UK sector through initiatives such as the government led "Civil Society Strategy: building a future that works for everyone" which sets out a vision for social enterprises. The Social Economy Alliance, developed in 2017, is another example of a collaborative initiative between various SE actors in the UK to promote the strengthening of the social economy sector.

1.2. Definition of Social Economy applied in the country context

The way in which the Social Economy is defined and the legal delineation of the concept depend on the national context and institutional framework. In Greece, there are no clear definitions or guidelines for understanding the Social Economy, but some broad reference to social interest and operational characteristics such as democratic governance or transformative role. In the UK, the Social Economy has no legal status or recognition, whilst the more commonly used notion of social enterprise is a slippery concept. In France, Spain and Italy, where the institutional recognition and regulation of the sector is stronger, the Social Economy is defined by law. For example, in Spain, the Law of 2011 defines the social economy as ‘the group of economic and business activities carried out in the private sphere, which in accordance with the principles set out in Article 4, pursue the collective interests of its members, in terms of general economic or social interests, or both’. Despite the differences in legislative frameworks, all five countries embrace a broad and inclusive approach to the Social Economy.

Definitions of the Social Economy can be articulated in terms of the types of organisations included, in this case the field tends to be very open and in all the countries under consideration, a similar list emerges: associations, foundations / trusts, mutual organisations, charities, NGOs, cooperatives, social enterprises (though this last category, again, is very conceptually and empirically slippery).

The Social Economy can also be defined in terms of a set of values and principles: social purpose, cooperation, local embeddedness, sustainability, participation, egalitarianism and democracy. These broad values can in turn be translated in terms of the means deployed and the ends pursued by the sector. If we consider the means deployed, there is an emphasis on democratic and participative management, egalitarian pay and benefits, the reinvestment of surplus in the activities of the organisation, and independence from public or for-profit organisations. If we try to define the Social Economy in terms of the ends pursued, here the emphasis is on the primacy of social utility or social good through community and on locally embedded development that is respectful of people as well as of the environment (be it the creation of employment opportunities in local areas, the development of community activities, or sustainable development for example). While this means / ends articulation enables us to outline a flexible vision of the Social Economy, not all of its dimensions always apply, or apply to the same extent in all contexts. For example, in the UK where there is no legal framework defining the sector, the criteria of democratic governance or reinvestment of profit in the activities of the organisations may not always apply to some self-identified social enterprises that are conventionally owned and controlled. In sum, we could define the social economy around the 3 dimensions of values, means and ends; but we need to be mindful that not all of the criteria outlined above would be relevant in all contexts, and that this threefold framework needs to be applied flexibly to retain an open and inclusive view of the Social Economy that attends to and respects differences across countries.

1.3. Types of educational/training programmes identified

In this section, we provide an overview of existing programmes in terms of their focus (e.g. on particular facets of the Social Economy), the content of the curriculum, the structure (e.g. Full-Time or part-time), the teaching methods used, and the degree of involvement of SE organisations in the conception and delivery of the programme.

1.3.1. Focus

If we focus on Master's level programmes related to the Social Economy, we have 40 courses in France, 25 in Italy, 16 in the UK, 9 in Spain and 1 in Greece. However, these programmes have different foci and emphases.

In France, higher education courses have been consolidated through a network initiated by a group of 30 universities to promote training and education in social and solidarity economy (RIUESS). The focus of most courses tends to be on Social and Solidarity Economy and this is made explicit in the titles of the courses, although some courses concentrate on particular facets of the Social Economy (e.g. Cultural Management, Social Inclusion, Sustainable Development, local development), or specialise in one particular areas of management (e.g. Financial management, or HRM). Very few courses mention social enterprise or social entrepreneurship in their titles. In Italy, most of the courses are run by Management Departments and this is reflected in their strong management focus which gets applied to three different facets or understandings of the social economy according to the courses: Social Economy / Third Sector, Social Enterprise, Cooperative Enterprise. In the UK the great majority of courses explicitly focus on social enterprises and entrepreneurship (9 programmes) while some appear to focus more on social innovation (3 programmes), cooperatives (2 programmes) and sustainability (4 programmes). Most of the programmes in the UK are delivered by Schools of Management or Business, with the curriculum concentrated in business related modules. In Spain, most courses focus on the Social Economy generally and are run by economics or business faculties, but one (run by Mondragon University) focuses specifically on cooperatives. In Greece, there is only one Master's degree related to the 'Social and Solidarity Economy' that is offered by the Hellenic Open University. There are, however, many related individual modules available in other postgraduate courses, for example on Commons and Alternative, or Participatory planning (both in the school of Spatial Planning and Development, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki); or on Cooperative Economics or Social Economy and Rural Development at the Agricultural University of Athens. Across the 4 countries, the primary audience seems to be graduate students who want to embark on a 1 year or 2 year master's programme in order to prepare for a career or research in the social economy. But some programmes are targeted at people currently employed in the social economy and offer the flexibility to combine employment and study through innovative 'alternating' models of studies (see below); these programmes tend to require students to have at least 3 or 4 years of experience working in a social economy organisation.

1.3.2. Thematic Content

All the courses reviewed offered a combination of theoretically driven modules embedded in the social sciences, and more vocational or practice oriented modules aimed at

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management and personal development. The balance between the various components vary according to country and the location of the programmes in Management Schools or Social Sciences and Humanities Faculties. In the UK and Italy, the emphasis seems to be more on management modules (e.g. HRM, accounting, financial management, governance, leadership, entrepreneurship) while there are also some more academic social science modules (for example on the Principles of Cooperatives, on the Social Economy, or on the Hybrid Economy) as well as modules focusing on particular facets of the social economy (e.g. culture, health, sustainability, or the digital economy). In Spain, France and Greece there seems to be a stronger emphasis on academic modules grounded in the social sciences (for example on the history, economic significance, principles and values of the Social Economy, as well as on public policy, or democratic governance, or the commons), even though there is also some more practice-oriented vocational content covering a range of management disciplines and competencies (e.g. finance, marketing, HR, developing a business plan). Throughout, there are also modules designed to develop transferrable skills and devoted for example to research methods, or languages, as well as social economy specific skills such as facilitating cooperation.

1.3.3. Structure

All the programmes reviewed are modular and usually offered over a 1 or 2 year period, with one programme in the UK, The Cooperative Leadership and Social Entrepreneurship programme at Sheffield Hallam University, offered over a 36 months period. Most also offer some flexible approaches that can take different forms. Besides the traditional Full time on campus teaching format, the courses tend to be offered in a variety of modes: Part-time, week-end, on a 'alternating' basis (e.g. as in France, one week of on-campus teaching, 2 weeks in work experience; or 3-4 days teaching a month, the rest of time in work experience). The alternating model is usually offered to students who study whilst working in a SE organisation. Some programmes also offer blended learning, or entirely distance, online teaching. Most programmes involve a combination of taught modules and, often at the end of the programme, a final dissertation, project work, or work placement.

1.3.4. Teaching methods and materials

The courses currently available are based on a combination of theoretical and practical approaches and material, with many elements of the course blurring the line between the two and enabling students to both reflect on and apply theoretical material to practical cases. The theoretical elements tend to follow quite traditional methods of teaching: on campus or online lectures, the provision of material, texts, documents online, or research based dissertations. The practical elements take a much more diverse range of forms. It can be the use of case studies, and here a particularly innovative element involves students researching and writing a real case study on particular topics or areas to become part of the material for the course (e.g. York St John University). Other examples of learning and teaching activities involve inviting students to apply knowledge to real situations, including conducting consultancy projects or some period or work placement in organisations in the social economy that the university is partnering with or that students have to identify. They could be local organisations, or in some cases NGOs or other social organisations in developing countries (these work placements are common in France and the UK). Other ways of introducing real world situations include fieldtrips and visits to local social economy actors, networking, inviting representatives of social economy organisations to give guest

lectures or participate in workshops. Other activities include developing business ideas and business plans for starting a social enterprise, or getting students to organise a conference, create a journal, or run a blog. Overall, the teaching methods currently used offer only limited opportunities for service learning, that is, for students to apply knowledge, as well as develop and reflect on their learning by engaging in activities that address the needs of the SE (See Part 4 of this report for further discussion and illustration of Service Learning in the context of Higher Education). Work placements, as included in some programmes, could potentially provide such an opportunity if they are carefully structured and designed in such a way as to provide a service to the recipient organisation.

1.3.5. Collaboration between HEIs, SE organisations and their local communities

Overall, there seems to be little collaboration between HEIs and actors of the social economy in the creation and development of the programmes. However in France, Spain and Italy, and to a lesser extent in the UK and Greece, social economy actors are involved in various capacities in the delivery of the programme. For example, in programmes in Italy, professionals from the social economy are invited to meet students as guests lecturers, or to participate in workshops, or to offer internships. In France, there are several levels at which local community organisations (e.g. coops, mutual societies, local development agencies) are involved in the various programmes reviewed: as guest lecturers or speakers, as one of the parties in the co-organisation of conferences or workshops, as providers of internships, and as providers of projects on which students can provide consultancy. In Spain, there are also two examples of collaboration not just in the delivery of the programmes but also in its development where a networks of social economy actors, together with local government in one case, participate in the co-organisation and financing of the programme.

1.3.6. Innovative educational approaches

The innovative approaches that were encountered in the programmes reviewed tend to fall into two areas: modes of delivery and learning approaches. In terms of delivery, the ‘alternating’ model (i.e. some short and concentrated periods of studies interspaced with longer periods at work) proposed by some programmes in France and the UK offer a flexible approach that enables people working within the social economy to combine academic studies and work in a way that encourages connection between the two. In all five countries, we also found some interesting experiential approaches that encourage students to reflect on and apply their knowledge to real cases either by working on the development of their own social enterprise, or by working on consultancy projects with existing actors of the local economy, even if most of these examples often fall short of service-learning in the sense that they are not always aimed at providing a service to social economy actors, or a positive social impact. One approach that goes further along the service-learning route concerns not a Master’s but a PhD programme at Mondragon university; this is based on the idea of ‘Collaborative Research and Transfer’ and aims to create knowledge that is applied and tested in cooperative organisations. A final example of an innovative learning approach involves getting students co-creating of knowledge through the development and editing of a journal or blog, or through the development of real-life case studies.

1.4. Conclusions

On the basis of the review of provisions in the five countries, the following lessons can be drawn in terms of existing provisions and the design of the needs analysis:

- In terms of content, it seems that many programmes are quite general in terms of their focus on social economy or social entrepreneurship, and that it would be worthwhile exploring the development of programmes focused on particular areas of interest in the social economy (e.g. health, environmental sustainability, cultural innovation for example).
- The pedagogical approaches currently used tend to be quite traditional, even though there are some examples of interesting and innovative practices, especially in relation to connecting knowledge with practical experiences (e.g. consultancy projects in collaboration social economy actors...), or involving students in the co-creation of knowledge.
- Collaboration between HEIs and social economy actors take different forms, however this tends to be at the delivery stage rather than in the development of the programmes or the co-creation of knowledge. In addition, there are very few examples of service-learning methodologies.

PART 2: NEEDS ANALYSIS – FINDINGS FROM GREECE, ITALY, SPAIN AND THE UK

The needs analysis follows from the state-of-the-arts analysis presented above, and draws upon the conclusions of the first part of the report to explore in more depth of ways in which SE education programmes could meet the needs and challenges of the SE. To this end, we interviewed 29 educators, 17 students (current or past) and 19 SE organisations across the 4 countries involved in the project to explore their various perspectives on the general approaches to the SE that educational programmes should take, the content of the curriculum (in terms of theoretical knowledge as well as more practical skills), the pedagogical methods that would be most effective, and the levels and nature of participation they felt SE organisations should have in the programmes. Below we first present the findings from each of the 3 groups separately. In the final section, we pull the perspectives of the three groups together to outline the main conclusions in terms of the needs that a Master's programme in SE should seek to address.

2.1. Educators

The analysis presented here is based on interviews with 29 educators (10 from the UK, 9 from Spain, 6 from Greece, 4 from Italy), representing various disciplines (e.g. management, economics, social sciences such as geography or politics) and involved in teaching different modules related to the social economy mostly at postgraduate levels. The analysis presented below first discusses what participants felt the aims and objectives of a programme about the social economy should be. Secondly, it outlines the areas of knowledge and competencies that were highlighted as important for such a programme. Thirdly, it looks at the modes of delivery and teaching methods deemed appropriate. And finally, it discussed the involvement of social economy educators.

2.1.1. General aims and objectives of the programmes

A common theme that emerged from our interviews in all four countries was the need for programmes to both be firmly anchored in the values of the social economy, and at the same time, to be open to a diverse audience in order to encourage cross-fertilising of perspectives and competencies. The majority of participants felt that social economy education should place a strong emphasis on social transformation, or as some expressed it, should be a political project aiming at building better worlds. As such, it should be firmly grounded in, and convey, core values such as democracy, justice, solidarity, inclusivity, environmentalism, local and community development. But whilst it was deemed important to make these values a central focus of programmes, it was also suggested that Social Economy education should be open to different audiences, different networks, and different approaches not traditionally associated with the social economy.

This need for greater openness in the way social economy is taught, was expressed in different ways by the participants. Firstly, it was suggested that social economy education should broaden its audience beyond students working in or training to work in the social economy to increase its visibility and, its attractiveness, more broadly and to foster cross-

fertilisation. In Spain and Greece, participants suggested that social economy education should start before university and target secondary education. For example, in Spain, the Fundación Finanzas Éticas has developed a series of pedagogical activities designed to help secondary school teachers talk about ethical banking to their pupils.

In the UK, this opening up of Social Economy education was talked about in terms of embedding social economy material in all programmes and all disciplines rather than just in programmes targeted at a niche of students already involved in the social economy, or training to work in it. Thus, there was a common emphasis on the need for universities not just to train people to work in the social economy, but more broadly, to develop the visibility and attractiveness of the social economy among the whole student population. So rather than develop a specialist course in the social economy, several felt it would be more productive to embed material about the social economy in every course.

In Italy, this opening up of social economy education was discussed in terms of mixing audiences in programmes or ‘multi-targeting’: offering social economy courses to students and professionals of public, private and third sector to promote dialogue, exchange of perspectives and collaboration. This mixing of audiences (from public sector and ‘social economy’) had indeed been experimented in one UK programme and been found to be very beneficial in terms of promoting innovation and collaboration.

Another dimension that was deemed important to promote openness and cross-fertilisation was the international reach of the programme. International partnerships and collaboration with Latin America are a strong element of existing programmes in Spain, but something which the participants felt could be further developed. Some of the UK participants also talked about the international dimension of programmes as an important pedagogical element to promote exchange between different perspectives, and to illustrate diverse economic forms as well as the institutional factors facilitating or hindering the development of the Social Economy. Finally, in the UK at least, the issue of diversity and inclusivity of the student population was raised, and it was suggested that programmes should do more to increase participation from ethnic minority groups.

In summary, across the four countries, it was felt that programmes on social economy should both have a strong grounding in Social Economy values and commitment to social transformation, and also be open enough to be attractive and relevant to a variety of different audiences. This ‘multi-targeting’ would increase the visibility of the SE, encourage the development of more innovative perspectives on the SE, and increase the sector adaptability to different and changing conditions, or help break with the potentially introspective nature of the social economy. This opening up could follow different directions: extend to secondary education, target and attract students from different disciplines or different sectors of the economy to promote cross-fertilisation, increase the social diversity and inclusivity of students, and strengthen international collaboration to promote students’ exchange and mobility.

2.1.2. Programme content

When asked what students should be taught on Social Economy programmes to address the sector’s needs and challenges, the participants highlighted a number of areas of knowledge and more practical competencies they felt were essential. It is not always easy

to distinguish between more theoretical knowledge and more practical competencies, but below we use this framework to outline the various elements that were suggested as important to include in a social economy programme, recognising that there is some overlap between the two areas.

What knowledge should be taught on a social economy programme?

- **Political economy**

There was a shared emphasis on providing students with some economic foundations that would enable them to understand the Social Economy within broader historical, political, and institutional contexts. Areas to cover could include a critique of the dominant economic model and neoliberalism, alternative economic perspectives such as feminist or ecological economics, and ideas of diverse or community economies. For some, it was important to introduce international comparisons to illustrate the diversity of economic forms and the institutional factors facilitating or hindering particular economic forms.

- **Social Value**

Another aspect of knowledge that was deemed important was related to the ideas of social value, social impact, and their measurement. This involves understanding and reflecting on what constitutes value or success; it also includes consideration of social accounting, social and environmental responsibility, ethical finance, capital, and banking. One important element stressed here was the concept of capital, the various forms it takes (economic, social, ethical, human, intellectual, natural), and its contribution to the process of social value creation. A related area, leaning more towards technical competencies, centres around impact management and evaluation. Here it was suggested that students should familiarise themselves with the tools and process of developing and presenting impact to relevant stakeholders and potential funders.

- **Democratic governance**

A third core element centred around issues of governance and ownership, and in particular understanding democratic management and stakeholder democracy. This, for example, included stakeholder analysis and analysis of democratic forms of organisation, consideration of management and leadership styles, and different forms of employee ownership.

- **People in Organisation**

There was also a sense that developing a different perspective on people in organisations deserved special attention. Indeed, it was felt that managing people in social economy organisations required particular perspectives, for example on how to manage people without treating them as resources, how to manage and motivate volunteers, how to attract and retain talents, or how to enrol employees and volunteers in the social mission of the organisation.

- **Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability**

Some participants also suggested there should be stronger focus on environmental sustainability, Climate Change and the Transition movement.

What competencies should be taught in a social economy programme?

Most respondents across the four countries insisted that while the theoretical perspectives necessary to understand the areas and issues above were important, it was equally if not more important to also develop more practical competencies. The following suggestions were made:

- **Managing complexity and Reconciling different demands**

One important competency highlighted by many participants across the four countries was the flexibility to reconcile social and business objectives, or a commitment to social values and the ability to withhold market pressures. It was argued that students should learn about the potential tensions between the different demands placed on social organisations, as well as the tools that could help them manage them. For example, skills related to problem-solving, conflict resolution and critical thinking were deemed important. It was suggested that students should be trained to 'problematise rather than simplify', to identify, define, address problems that defy easy solutions. In addition, social innovation, and social impact evaluation could also be helpful here in reconciling business and social demands.

- **Democratic management**

A second and related area of competencies that was highlighted across the board concerned democratic management. More specifically, consensus building, horizontal decision-making, running assemblies, conflict resolution, encouraging democratic participation, were mentioned. One argued that for teaching these skills, peace studies and the Transition movement could form useful sources of inspiration. It was also suggested that students should be taught how to recognise and address the challenges of remaining democratic in the face of possible degeneration.

- **Networking and collaboration**

Another important area centred around networking, collaboration and the ability to build partnership across boundaries, be it across sectors of activities, or with public or private sector partners, or at an international level. Participants in all four countries stressed how important it was to be able to collaborate and network across different countries, be it for example at a European level, or as in the case of Spain, with Latin America.

- **Managerial competencies**

Participants also mentioned more standard managerial and business competencies such as business planning, strategy, financial literacy, or marketing.

- **Digital transformation**

It was felt that students should learn about the opportunities and threats raised by the digital economy and how to adapt to them.

- **Communication and Social media**

Here it was suggested that it was important for social economy organisations to develop effective practices in the use of social media to promote their objectives.

2.1.3. Modes of delivery and teaching methods

The courses in which the participants are currently involved all had some elements of interactive teaching, and at least since the COVID pandemic, some blended learning, although to different degrees. Maybe a theme that aptly captures participants' suggestions here is diversity: diversity of modes of delivery and of teaching methods. To turn to modes of delivery first, it was generally felt that blended learning was beneficial. This involves mixing online and in-class teaching, maybe alternating period of intense activities where all students are physically present, for say a long weekend or 4 days, with periods of online activities of a month or so centred around self-learning. Some also mentioned the possibility of organising summer schools to provide the opportunity for longer periods of concentrated learning and exchange between students, teachers and social economy organisations. In the UK at least, it was also deemed important to be able to offer both Full-Time and Part-Time modes of studies as this would ensure that a wider pool of students could participate.

In terms of methods, there is already a strong element of interactive, experiential learning built in many of the programmes the participants were involved in, and many ideas of activities that seem to work well. As we saw in the first part of the report, existing programmes already make space for interactive learning, through for example, consultancy projects, fieldtrips and visits to local social economy actors, networking, inviting representatives of social economy organisations to give guest lectures or participate in workshops. Other activities include developing business ideas and business plans for starting a social enterprise, or getting students to organise a conference, create a journal, or run a blog.

But there was also a widespread suggestion that there was more scope for innovative and interactive teaching. These two points about effective existing methods, and suggestions for improvement are developed below.

Most programmes involve a traditional mix of academic study (i.e. taught classes on campus or increasingly with the pandemic, online; reading material) and more practice-based and interactive elements (e.g. seminars, guest lectures, case studies, work placements, group work and collaborative essay writing, networking with social economy actors). Examples of effective interactive practices already used by the participants include:

- Using case studies from Social Economy organisations familiar to students, either through having a strong presence in the local area or being renowned organisations more widely.
- Organising visits to social economy organisations
- Getting students to write essays or blog entries collaboratively on particular aspects of the Social Economy
- Developing mentoring schemes whereby students have an academic mentor as well as a mentor from the social economy.

However, there was a sense among all participants that the interactive, action-learning element of the courses could be developed further, and that students should be encouraged to spend more of their studies working with or on social economy organisations, so that virtually every module involved some engagement with an organisation. In particular, there are two ways in which participants suggested the experiential learning component could be improved: by strengthening peer-to-peer learning between students, and by strengthening students' engagement with social economy organisations. More specific ideas related to these two elements include:

- Students creating their own cooperative / social business at the start of the programme and running with it throughout the course; at the end of the programme, students can choose to carry on running the organisation, or fold it. This is an idea that is already put in practice at Mondragon University, but was suggested by several participants in the UK as something worth developing more broadly. This is an option that would need careful consideration as operating a SE business is very time-consuming and would therefore mean that students would have less time to focus on other areas.
- Students identifying and outlining their own issues and problems concerning their organisations at the beginning the course; part of the modules would then be articulated around these concerns, to help students understand them, address them and share experiences. So, the curriculum would be partly shaped by students' needs and concerns and would make space for reflexive and interactive learning between students and staff.
- Students working in partnership with local communities to address community-related challenges. This could take the form of a live project module where groups of students go through different phases of learning, first by covering relevant theoretical material, then by being introduced to different methodologies and to the community groups they are to collaborate with, and finally by working in partnership with their assigned community group to address the set challenges.
- Course material designed through an iterative and interactive process whereby students research and write case studies that then become part of the material for the course; so the process of researching and identifying problems in / with the case organisations would as important to students' learning as the content of these cases.
- Strengthening the international network of universities offering courses in social economy to facilitate exchange, networking and mobility of students

However, several participants, particularly in the UK, raised concerns about the possibility of introducing more innovative Social Economy programmes within the context of universities and stressed that there would be many institutional barriers to overcome: market and financial pressures might not make such courses attractive to UK universities; and the bureaucratic hurdles of getting programmes approved could also act a significant obstacle. There is also the issue of funding for these programmes, the limited available resources and the Universities' economic-centric approach to education.

2.1.4. Involvement of social economy organisations

The majority of the participants reported some degree of collaboration with Social Economy organisations. As indicated above, there are many ways in which these organisations are involved in programmes; most commonly, this takes the form of the delivery of guest lectures, participation in workshops, provision of work placement or projects.

However, the ideas for stronger interactive action-learning elements reviewed in the section above suggest a need to increase the involvement of Social economy organisations to go beyond delivery towards shaping the curriculum and designing the material. In particular, it is suggested that Social economy organisations could contribute to the definition and articulation of the key issues or problems that could shape the curriculum. Several ideas were suggested that clearly echo those mentioned above:

- At the beginning of the course, students from the social economy sector could bring in their own ideas about the challenges and issues they face. The various modules of the course could then help them understand and address these issues.
- Students could write case studies in collaboration with social economy organisations, with both parties jointly defining the key issues and problems.
- Social economy organisations could be involved as beneficiaries of the programmes by getting services from students acting as consultants and delivering services they could otherwise not afford (e.g. development of a website, market research, legal advice...).

Finally, several participants noted that the development of closer collaboration between universities and social economy organisations would be easier for programmes specialising in a particular aspect or domain of the social economy. Such tailoring would ensure that SE organisations had a greater stake in the programme.

2.2. Students

2.2.1. General information about our participants: motivation/aspirations

For the purpose of our study, we interviewed 17 students who were either enrolled in, or graduates of, a master's programme, and 1 undergraduate student. All interviewees were doing courses related to social economy and/or social entrepreneurship, cooperatives, degrowth and political ecology. Students attending these programmes, as reflected in our pool of participants, came from educational backgrounds as diverse as philology and biology. Less than half of our interviewees had prior studies in a Business-related subject area, while a significant number of participants came from other disciplines including psychology, sociology, anthropology, journalism and political science. The vast majority of the participants however had prior experience working (e.g. in cooperatives or labour unions) or volunteering (e.g. as community organisers) in the wider social economy sector, while there were few coming from rather diverse sectors. All, however, reported a strong aspiration to continue working in the sector, open up their own initiatives or reorient their career towards social enterprises. The majority of our participants reported a strong interest

in alternative business models, believed that changing how we do business was a pressing matter. They often referred to the idea of ethically oriented business practices and the need to give more emphasis to the environment and community development.

Not all were involved in social economy organisations at the time of the interviews, yet they widely reported an interest to be more actively involved in the social economy sector and thus doing a degree that would provide them with the necessary skills and competencies to pursue their aspirations. Identifying and enrolling in social economy courses was, in most cases, self-initiated. On many occasions though, students found out about the programmes through personal networks (word of mouth) and contacts (email lists), while existing University networks were also crucial for initiating contacts with prospective students. Furthermore, many of our interviewees were working while studying, different modes of delivery were also important for choosing the relevant courses.

2.2.2. Students' expectations

Our findings suggest a general satisfaction in terms of courses meeting the main expectations across all the programmes that our participants were enrolled in. We identified a number of common, but also distinctive, practices across the programmes. Students' expectations also vary, but there were many common expectations too. For example, programmes in the UK were not explicitly on the social economy (primarily focusing on the idea of social innovation and entrepreneurship) and were more business oriented. This was in contrast to those in Italy, Greece and Spain that were relatively more explicit about their focus on the social and solidarity economy, cooperative enterprises, political ecology and degrowth. Some programmes appeared to be more theoretically rigorous, yet all maintained a relative balance between theory and practice. Opportunities for networking with social economy organisations and actual collaborations between SE organisations and Universities were rather limited, although some programmes (e.g. those in UK Universities) appeared to be stronger than in other cases (e.g. Greece).

There was clear room for improvement in the programmes' capacity to meet our participants' expectations. Reference to the need for more practical courses, the development of employability and wider practical skills and competencies and opportunities for internships were prevalent across our participants responses in terms of what could be done to further improve existing courses. There were also some very context and programme specific issues, such as the need to appreciate cultural differences in the modes of delivery in the courses or the need to decolonise the curriculum.

2.2.3. Evaluation of the experience

Evaluation of preparation to work in the social economy field

Overall, our participants reported that the programmes they had enrolled in prepared them reasonably well for working in the social economy field. There was a general interest in more practical courses that would help students gain skills and competencies and that would help them to work in or run social economy enterprises, but overall, they all agreed that there was a good balance between theory and practice. Programme specific elements and students' work experience and educational background influenced our participants' evaluation. For example, in some programmes (see UK report) all participants appeared satisfied with existing networking opportunities and the course engagement with SE

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organisations, while in other cases (e.g. Italy and Greece) it was considered an area to be further improved. In a similar fashion, programmes in Italy, Spain or Greece, appeared to be relatively more tailored towards the SE sector as opposed to the UK programmes that were more generic and about entrepreneurship and social innovation.

Evaluation of knowledge and competences

Our participants reported gaining knowledge and awareness about social aspects of doing business, community impact, and sustainability. In terms of the theoretical rigorousness of these programmes, in some countries (e.g. Spain) this seems to be more prevalent than in others (e.g. UK), as reflected in our participants responses. Students' perceptions of the practical skills and competencies gained from the programmes varied, with those in the UK appearing to be satisfied with the knowledge acquired in terms of running a business or doing business planning and modelling, while in Spain or Greece, these areas needed further improvement. In Italy too, students seemed to be satisfied by the competencies and skills gained in the programmes they attended, but reported a potential further improvement in gaining business-oriented skills such as how to develop strategies or sustainable finance and HRM practices.

Evaluation of training and teaching methods

In terms of teaching methods, all our participants reported a general satisfaction. We identified strong similarities in the methods for teaching (lectures and seminars) and assessment (group works, individual assignments and reports, presentations, projects and dissertations) across all programmes, but there were also some positive variations that further enriched individual programmes. For example, the development of a Wikipedia entry (in a programme in Greece) was particularly welcomed by students as it gave them 'the feeling of contributing directly to the diffusion of knowledge'. Using more student-centric and engaging methods in the delivery of materials was also viewed as a very positive approach that contributed to the creation of 'a rich and motivated class atmosphere' (as in Spain). Flexible modes of learning through synchronous and asynchronous activities could be seen as a very useful way to engage students who are working while studying or come from different educational backgrounds. Students appeared to value the use of project-based and practiced oriented approaches, the use of networking, and bespoke assessments that could help them address their individual needs but also take into consideration their different cultural backgrounds and material conditions.

Furthermore, students consistently emphasized the need for programmes that could offer more opportunities for collaboration with SE organisations, programmes that would balance theory and practice (and that should be reflected both in the teaching methods and assessments) and offer innovative teaching approaches (e.g. peer education), in line with our objectives to co-create knowledge through the strengthening of collaboration between the various stakeholders (educators, students and SE organisations).

Finally, any new programmes should take into consideration the characteristics of the targeted audience. Our participants often reported heavy workload as a factor negatively affecting their studies. Understanding cultural differences and educational backgrounds seems to be highly important while the use of student-centric approaches should be more

evident in the materials covered, the teaching methods employed and the methods of assessments.

Evaluation of the involvement of social economy organizations

Our findings suggest that the involvement of social economy organisations in the programmes and opportunities for students to network and/or engage with organisations (e.g. through internships and placements) could be improved, particularly in the case of Italy, Greece and Spain. Such opportunities and networks appear to be relatively more established in the UK, as reflected in our participants responses. Likewise in Spain, students appeared to value the contact and collaboration with Mondragon cooperatives, to particularly enjoy the field trips, and how final master's projects helped students to deepen their understanding of SE organisations. Overall, the involvement of SE organisations in the designing or running of programmes is rather limited and, in most cases, non-existent, and a potential area that could be improved. It should be noted however that resource constraints are among the key factors preventing strengthening collaborations between higher education institutions and SE organisations.

2.3. SE Organisation

2.3.1. General Information

For the purpose of our study, we interviewed 19 SE organisations that vary significantly in terms of nature (e.g. some were network organisations, others were local cooperatives), size (e.g. some had thousands of members while others had a relatively small membership), purpose and objectives (e.g. some were more related to knowledge transfer, consultancy and research activities, others were more involved in community development and/or representing social economy organisations to city councils, government and policy makers), structure (e.g. some appear more hierarchical than others, with size influencing their structures) or practices (e.g. community support, financing other businesses, consultation, research, knowledge exchange and supply chain support). Their life cycle was also different with some SE organisations operating for over 25 years while other were recently established.

The participants' seniority and educational background varied, while they had extensive work experience across the private and social economy sector. They all reported being driven by a desire to support local communities, raise awareness about the importance of doing socially impactful business and assist in promoting the social economy sector through a range of business support initiatives, from bespoke support to education and research, policy making and networking.

2.3.2. Perception about SE and ongoing challenges

Views, perceptions and definitions of the SE, vary from one country to another. In Spain for instance, we noticed a distinction in the understanding of Social Economy and Solidarity Economy as well as the prioritisation of the individual and human well-being over capital. Social Economy was defined primarily in terms of its organisational and governance

structure as opposed to the Solidarity Economy where organisational structures were considered alongside organisational goals (beyond profit). In this context, participants also reflected on the tensions emerging between these two aspects of the SE, concluding the dominance of SE over Solidarity Economy. While social economy enterprises are often perceived as conventional businesses with a more 'social purpose', social solidarity economy organisations appeared to be perceived to differ in the sense that they more explicitly orient their objectives towards people and human/social needs rather than profit, with participants going as far as to suggest that 'SSE [...] is a reversal of capitalism: the ends are people and the means are economic activity'. Despite the potentially different perceptions between the SE and SSE, it is important to understand and appreciate the context in which these organisations operate and the subsequent tensions between their social objectives and need to be economically viable.

Furthermore, the challenges SE organisations experience vary at times and are context specific, yet there are also similarities that emerged across all our participants' responses. For example, in Italy participants placed more emphasis on their relationships with public institutions and the need for raising public administrators' awareness of SE organisations, their needs and capabilities. This is something also found in the UK, with our participants emphasizing the need for strengthening communication with central government. Other important challenges related to HR and other inter-organisational practices, employees' recruitment and the development of new skills, as reported by our participants in Italy and the UK; something that was also shared by our interviewees in Greece with reference to the need for training and the development of soft skills. A support network could also help SE organisations to flourish, while peer-learning was also mentioned by some. While institutional support was considered as an important challenge across all our participants, our interviewees from Spain reported having ongoing debates about the desirability of receiving state subsidies, which contributed to organisational stability, but at the expense of autonomy.

The issue of reach, scale and visibility was also common across most of our participants. In Spain, our participants reflected on the issue of size and reaching out to new markets (referring to Mondragon as an exception). In the UK, they reflected more on networking and wider communication approaches with reference to seeking out ways to effectively promote social economy, develop networks and communicate with other businesses outside the social economy sector about the character, objectives and operations of SE businesses. They also pointed to the tensions they experience due to the social character and the economic objectives of businesses, when seeking collaborations beyond the social economy sector. Educational programmes, although not sufficient by themselves (for example lobbying was also mentioned as relevant), were considered as useful for addressing the issue of visibility within the wider population. In particular, one respondent suggested that besides developing specialist programmes targeted at people already working within the sector, it would be beneficial to attract talented managers to the sector, for example, by bringing the social economy sector to visibility on MBA programmes.

Finally, the issue of structural challenges and the tensions between their social objectives and economic viability was also explicitly raised by some. Reference to fundamental considerations and issues were reported to give rise to internal debates on matters such as

that of growth vs stability, values vs burn-out, growth vs ecology. These matters are well reported in the relevant literatures and bear upon long-standing debates about the degeneration thesis. The issue of values, although not explicit, was considered by some of our participants, yet it was more explicit in the responses of our interviewees from Spain and Greece.

2.3.3. Interest and Expectations from Educational programmes: Areas of knowledge, competencies and skills needed.

Our participants reported a strong interest in, and need for, educational programmes focusing explicitly on social economy education and offering something distinctive from conventional entrepreneurship programmes. They also stressed the need for that developing a programme that could highlight the importance of running the economy with a more ethical and socially-impactful compass and have applicability across all sectors.

They all focused on the need to provide education that would be theoretically rigorous and practice-oriented, suitable for those interested in the Social Economy and Third sector. Some also distinguished the needs of individuals and organisations within the social economy sector in relation to life-cycle stage of the business, suggesting the need to appreciate that the needs for start-ups and those at a growth stage might vary. With reference to skills and competencies, most participants emphasized the importance of acquiring both hard and soft skills from these programmes. For example, there were consistent reference across all our participants about the importance of developing essential skills and competencies to run their businesses, from basic day-to-day operations and understanding balance sheets, to the effective management of resources, to setting their mission statement, to building strategies of growth and scaling up their businesses, to digitalisation, networking and collaboration strategies, to evaluating and managing impact, and to strategies to finance their business, social financing and developing funding bids. In addition, equal weight was placed on the development of more 'soft skills' such as active listening and conflict resolution.

Furthermore, some of our participants pointed to the role of educational programmes in encouraging more people to join the Social Economy sector with an entrepreneurial spirit. As they stressed, educational programmes at a University level should give more attention to SE organisations and that SE businesses are in fact very easy to start up, encouraging more students to feel confident about entering the SE which represents a low-risk and high-reward strategy.

Finally, educational programmes should be more context-specific and be mindful of their audience (e.g. their educational and cultural background and their expectations). Our participants from Spain for instance, emphasized the importance of understanding and acknowledging that different localities have different rules and regulations regarding the SE and thus education should therefore be context-specific to best serve the students from that given region. In the UK, and in line with responses we had from students, cultural elements and understanding the background of students could also contribute to enhancing their learning experience but also provide a more realistic understanding of the challenges that SE actors, coming from different social and cultural backgrounds, are likely to face.

2.3.4. Relationship and forms of collaboration with universities and other educational agencies

In terms of relationships and collaborations all our participants reported already having or trying to engage in joint activities with higher education institutions (HEIs), yet these activities are mainly circumstantial, limited and based more on personal contacts and initiatives rather than having any institutionalised form. Collaboration focuses predominantly on research projects, guest lectures or events. There are no institutionalised collaborations between SE organisations and HEIs, despite the strong interest and motivation of SE actors to strengthen and promote SE education. One of the key reasons for the lack of ongoing collaborations seems to be the lack of financial support, with participants from Spain and the UK highlighting the need for universities to help in creating a more favourable environment for strengthening collaborations between HEIs and SE organisations. In the UK for example, collaborations are rather limited and tend to be initiated by individuals. Some interviewees reported having initiated collaborations with research institutes and outsourced their research-related activities, while others were in early stages of developing educational provisions with well-established research centres and universities such as the Said School of Business at the University of Oxford.

Furthermore, many of our participants appeared interested in working and collaborating with secondary education in order to promote the SE; yet, as with HEIs, the established relations and collaborations are partial and one-way, based on their own initiatives and personal networks. In Italy, collaborations between educational agencies and SE organisations seems to be relatively more institutionalised, yet partnerships rely heavily on educators' and principals' availability. It should be noted though that schools depend on cultural associations for the delivery of various educational and cultural themes (e.g. courses on music and creative arts). Nevertheless, our participants reported a range of activities including the organisation of events, and the use of case study activities to raise pupils' awareness. All participants were particularly open to the idea of strengthening collaborations with secondary education and the importance of promoting SE sector to younger generations as the key for the growth and development of a vibrant Social Economy sector.

Finally, SE organisations reported having stronger ties and collaboration with local authorities, as opposed to national level governments, while their degree of collaboration and the extent they could reach out to authorities vary, due to their size and purpose. They also reported mixed feelings about the understanding of local authorities regarding the dynamics and potentialities of the SE. In the UK for instance, our participants were more confident receiving support at the local level while in other countries (e.g. Greece) they were concerned regarding the limited understanding of the SE in local government and its perceptions of how SE organisations could contribute to community development and economic growth.

2.4. Summary and Conclusion

On the basis of the findings from the three groups presented above, we can draw the following conclusions about the ways in which a programme about the SE could be designed to meet the needs of the SE and of the various actors involved:

1. Across the four countries, it was felt that programmes on social economy should both have a strong grounding in SE values and be open enough to attract a variety of different audiences and adapt to different and changing environments. Educators, students and SE organisations all felt that the values of the social economy should figure strongly in the programme and inform its approach, content and methods. Educators suggested that SE education should be firmly grounded in the values of democracy, social justice, solidarity, cooperation, local development and sustainability. Similarly, students were attracted to SE education to learn to do business differently, for example, by promoting cooperation and community development; and SE organisations also stressed the importance of conveying social values. But this strong grounding in social values should be accompanied by an opening up to a diversity of audiences. This 'multi-targeting' would encourage the development of more innovative perspectives on the social economy, and increase the sector's ability to adapt to changing conditions, or break with the sector's potential 'introspective' tendency. Opening up to different audiences could follow various directions: extending to secondary education, targeting and attracting students from different disciplines or different sectors of the economy, increasing the social and cultural diversity of students, and strengthening international collaboration.
2. Several areas of knowledge and competencies were highlighted as essential to the development of the social economy. In terms of areas of theoretical knowledge to cover, participants mentioned the following: foundations in political economy, democratic governance (e.g. consensus and consent-based decision-making, membership engagement, managing conflict and complexity), Social Value (e.g. social accounting, social capital, impact evaluation), Managing People in Organisations, and Environmental Sustainability. The more practical skills that were identified included Networking and Collaboration, Managerial competencies (from strategy to financial management to marketing for example), Digital Transformation, or Social Media and Communication.
3. All three groups seem to agree that there should be a diversity of modes of delivery (e.g. blended, full time and part time studies) to attract and tailor for a diverse pool of students, and a diversity of teaching methods to promote more interactive and experiential learning. While there is already an element of interactive, action-learning in existing programmes (e.g. case studies, creation of blogs, workshops, work projects), it was felt that this should be developed through more innovative methods of both teaching and assessment that would build stronger ties between students and SE organisations, as well as encourage peer-

to-peer learning so that all parties (academic staff, SE organisations and students) can contribute to the creation of knowledge. For example, it was suggested that students and SE actors could be more involved in defining the issues and problems driving the curriculum. This could be through students writing case studies for the course, or coming to programmes with their own set of issues as SE actors, or running their own 'experimental' social business. Overall, all seemed to agree that there was a need for more practice-based learning, more flexible methods of delivery and assessment that would cater more closely to students' various needs and circumstances, and stronger networking opportunities between students and SE organisations, including at international level.

4. Finally, and drawing on the point above, it was suggested that the role of social economy actors be extended beyond delivery to include the shaping of knowledge and curriculum. Another suggestion to expand the role of Social Economy actors is to involve them as beneficiaries of services provided by students (e.g. designing media platforms, providing legal advice, providing management consultancy).